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Pirates of the Muskeg

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—A STORY OF HIGH ADVENTURE IN
THE CANADIAN WILDS WHERE THE LONE "MOUNTIE"
IS THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW

By William Byron Mowery

SEARCHING for a spot to land and camp, Sergeant Scott peered ahead into the purpling twilight.

Like a fleeting mottled shadow on the water, his black canoe glided swiftly downstream between the walls of Keewatin pine. On the bosom of the river a little light still lingered, but the forest on either bank loomed over him dark and silent.

It was late October. With the setting of the sun a zero tang had crept into the air. A short "squaw winter" of heavy frosts and stormy weather had passed three weeks ago, and the mellow Indian summer was drawing to its close. Ptarmigan and snowshoe rabbit had changed to their white winter garb; the early migrants already had winged south.

It was a question of days, now, and perhaps of hours until the first blizzard, yelping down from the Barren Grounds, would freeze the waterways and blanket the country in snow.

Handicapped with a dangerous prisoner

in his canoe, two hundred miles from his patrol district and three hundred from the Mounted Police post; buried in a wilderness of woods and rivers that he knew only from crude maps of the Chippewyans, Scott should have been somewhat concerned about his predicament.

But he was softly whistling "*Jolie Alouette*," and picturing the commotion at barracks when he tramped out of the woods and kicked on the door and told the men to come take a square look at what he had bagged!

His prisoner, the coming blizzard, and the three hundred wilderness miles worried him not at all. He was at home in the Strong-Woods; he had yet to lose his first prisoner; and he knew that when lakes and rivers caught over, he could cache the canoe, and strike overland to the post as straight as the flight of a teal *en travers*.

To his ears came the throbbing swish of white waters around the next river bend. It sounded like a gentle rapids that he

could shoot safely enough in spite of the owl-dusk.

His prisoner, lying bound in the prow of the canoe, heard the beating *saut* ahead, and sat up.

Scott guessed the man's thought.

"Lie down, you!" he commanded in bush French. "You're figuring on upsetting us in the *saut* and scrambling ashore, and escaping in the dusk. Lie down!"

The prisoner lay back on the blanket packs, sullen and silent for a few moments. Then:

"Damn' accident!" he burst out savagely, his brute voice husky with thwarted anger. "Damn' accident you got me, Yellow-Stripes! *Splaa*—you could not have taken me otherwise in a thousand years. I give you ten thousand to get my comrades!"

"My capturing you might have been accident," Scott agreed, "but there's going to be no accident between here and the post. Make up your mind you're going in peacefully—and you'll go in *alive*."

The gray-haired prisoner rose to an elbow. His flare of anger seemed to have passed. He spoke throatily, exultantly. There was a lurking threat in his voice like the sibilant, warning hiss of a snake.

"You will take me in, Yellow-Stripes. Without doubt. You—and your black canoe—have a mighty reputation. You are a terror to bush-loping bandits. You deserve the compliment of their fears. I salute you—and your *canot noir*. I am manacled; you will take me in.

"But after you have got me there, what then? I lie here bound, your prisoner. You laugh now, you young fool; you think you have the whip hand. It is *I* who have that whip hand. I have a power over you, M'sieu' Scott, that you do not dream about.

"When you get me to the post, when my comrades find out what has happened to me, a whisper will come out of the Great Marsh. It will make you writhe. It will put gray hairs in that black poll of yours.

"You may struggle against that whisper for awhile, Yellow-Stripes, but in the end you will come to the butter tub some night and unlock the door of my cell and beg me to escape! You yourself!"

Scott laughed at the preposterous idea of unlocking a cell and begging a prisoner to escape. A dozen times that afternoon he had listened to this threat of a whisper coming out of the big muskeg.

He did not have the faintest notion what his prisoner was driving at. He did not greatly care; for his conscience, which alone could give any man a power over him, was as clean as the sheets of his service record.

He thought the words were mere empty bluffing—a cunning attempt to prey upon his fears by the threat of some intangible, mysterious power.

But the taunt of accident rankled, because it was true. In his own mind Scott admitted it was true. In a single lucky moment he had done what he had failed to do in long, arduous seasons of patrolling.

Not through superior prowess or neat-handed craftiness was he taking the prize prisoner in, but through sheer accident. His sporting soul revolted at the circumstances.

And he admitted, too, that unless another miracle happened, he would never capture the confederates of his prisoner. For two years, now, he had pitted all his man-hunting wizardry against them, and failed. He had tried every scheme, trick or stratagem he knew of. There was nothing left to try.

His job of capturing the fur pirates of the Great Marsh was more than a mere perfunctory duty with Scott. It had become a personal issue to him, and he had given all he had of brain and body to the task.

For one thing the brutal, murderous work of the band aroused his cold fury as nothing else had ever done. For another, his capturing them meant everything to him.

It meant the inspectorship which he would have got two years ago except for a jealous superior. It meant he would be lord of his own post at some station in the Strong-Woods, no longer tied down by an incompetent inspector, able at last to do things as he knew they ought to be done, settled permanently some place where he could build up a home.

It meant that the dwindling reputation of himself and the black canoe would be restored to where it had been before his superior cunningly detailed him to this hopeless task of capturing the fur pirates.

But in spite of all his zeal and his fury, and all that success would mean, he had failed utterly. Rendezvoused in the huge swamp land, the gang sallied out, murdered, escaped with their booty of furs, and laughed at his pursuit.

On the innumerable waterways of the Great Marsh, their canoes left no tracks he could follow. His whole bitter failure boiled down to just that: canoes leave no tracks.

II

THE swish of the rapids ahead grew louder. On his left the whitish gleam of birches appeared among the minaret pines. They meant firewood and a glade to camp in. Scott angled closer, and searched for a break in the twelve-foot bank.

As though a bullet had whizzed past his throat he started suddenly, paddle upraised for a stroke. From the dark bank not a hundred feet away, a voice broke the taut, frosty silence. A woman's voice—clear, high pitched, and silvery.

"Le canot noir—noir! Mercy of Heaven, it is the black canoe!"

Scott sat dumfounded. A rifle shot and a bullet singing past would have galvanized him into action; they were part of the day's work. But a woman's voice from the blackness of the pines and spruces in that savage, lonely wilderness, two hundred miles from a white habitation—this cry of a woman stunned him.

She was no Indian girl, nor *métisse*—half-breed—but a white woman, her voice girlish. In her tones he heard an uncontrollable surprise at the sudden sight of his canoe; and her cry was vibrant with all the joy and devout thanksgiving of a woman's soul.

For a few seconds Scott could not think, much less act. He stared wide-eyed at the wall of darkness where the voice came from. The canoe drifted downstream, quickening its speed as the waters narrowed and swiftened for the *saut*.

From the grove of birches came a sound like a sob. Then the girl's voice rang out again, this time pleading with him, drawing him back to her.

"Scott! Sergeant Scott! Sergeant Brian Scott!"

"Hello!" he called, because he could think of nothing else. "I'm guiding in right now."

With a powerful back-stroke he stopped the canoe, and skirled it in toward the bank. Beneath the fringe of shadows he saw a jutting rock, a canoe tied there, and very dimly a path leading back into the forest.

As his own craft touched, and he stepped

out, a slender, girlish figure appeared out of the blackness and glided toward him.

"Good Heavens!" he stammered. "What are you doing here, girl? Do you live here?"

The girl drew near him hesitantly, till she was looking up into his face and he caught the perfume of her hair. He stared at her, astounded, unable to see her clearly in the murky darkness.

And while he stared, bewildered and unable to think, she put her hands on his shoulders and half turned him so that the lingering light of the river touched his features. Intently she studied them, rising on tiptoe.

"Yes," she said slowly, disregarding his questions and his bewilderment. "Yes, you are Brian Scott."

She pronounced it Bree-ahn, the French way, as only his intimate friends spoke it; but her accent was undoubtedly English. Her low voice sounded to him like the purl of waters. He stood wide-legged in front of her, trying to sort one question out of the dozen tumbling through his head.

In the name of the Lord, who was this girl? What was she doing there in that wilderness?

If she had faded to a shadow and vanished altogether he would not have been surprised. He actually reached out a hand and touched her hair.

"But who are you?"

"When I saw your canoe," she went on, with a strange throb in her voice, "I could not believe, Mr. Scott. And when it drifted on past I thought I was *dreaming* of what I wanted to see."

"But now—now I know you are Brian Scott. He has described you a hundred times to me, and shown me pictures of you."

A dozen fresh questions stampeded in Scott's brain. Heavens above him! Who was this girl? No trapper's wife or daughter talked like that—and, besides, no trapper had penetrated to that wilderness river almost at the edge of the Barren Grounds. She was no factor's daughter out roaming who lost her way; the nearest trading station was almost a week's travel distant.

"Who described me to you?" he blurted out. "What are you doing here on this river? How do you know who I am when I don't know you? Do you live here?"

"Our cabin is just a stone's toss back. It's dusk now; you'll have to camp soon—

and won't you stay at my cabin to-night? I'll explain about myself then. Oh, you have a prisoner!"

The man had risen and stepped out upon the mud-smeared rock, and stood four paces away from them.

Scott glanced from his hulking old form to the slim lithe figure of this girl, trying to think, trying to shake off the spell of her hands upon his shoulders, and her face upturned so close to his. He choked back his questions and bewilderment, and reasoned what to do.

It was a queer situation that he suddenly found himself in. He remembered her cry, like a cry for help, drawing him in to her. Whoever this girl was or whatever she needed him for, he could not go on without finding out what her anxiety meant, and helping her if he could.

It was time to camp, anyway. The cabin she spoke of would be a safer place than the forest for his crafty prisoner that night.

But the mystery of this girl he had found there, the spell of her face upturned to his, the faint perfume about her, were a dozen times more powerful than the reasons he admitted to himself.

"I'll be glad to sleep under a roof to-night," he answered. "And I'll be mighty glad if I can be of any help or—or use to you."

He drew his belt-gun, and kept it in his hand as he spoke to the man.

"Get up the path, you, ahead of us. It's dark, but don't make the mistake of trying to pitch off into the bush—or I won't have that pleasure of unlocking your cell in the butter tub!"

III

He lifted the canoe out upon the rock. With the prisoner in front of them, they started through the birch growth toward the cabin.

Scott took the girl's arm, and shielded her from brush swishing back. With all the bewildering questions hammering through his brain, he felt he surely must be walking in his sleep, and would wake up presently.

"What are you doing here, Brian?" The name slipped familiarly from her lips. "You're terribly far away from your patrol district. No wonder I didn't believe my own eyes when I saw the black canoe!"

Great snakes, this slip of a girl seemed to know all about him! There was friend-

ship, intimacy even, in her tones. But nothing forward or assumed about her; she simply acted as though she had known him for years.

And she was counting dead certain on his helping her. By her eagerness, by the passion of her words, she showed that his coming had been a blessed miracle to her.

Though her voice was strange to him, he felt that surely he was acquainted with her, and would recognize her when he could see her features plainly. But what was she doing there in that wilderness? What did she want of him? The whole jumble of questions sprang to his lips again. Resolutely he swallowed them. She had promised to tell him at the cabin.

"Why are you over here, Brian?" she repeated.

"It's only fair for me to know your name; you know mine."

"It's Beatrice."

From the Landing to the Circle, from Fullerton to the Mackenzie, Scott was at least acquainted with every white girl near her age. And she was none of *those five*. None of them was named Beatrice. None of them was of her slender height or limpid voice.

"Mamselle Beatrice?" he asked.

The question slipped out impulsively, before he could check it.

"Yes, Miss Beatrice. Now will you answer my question?"

"I was tracking some bandits out of the Red Loon district. More or less by guess-work I trailed 'em northeast to the edge of the tundra. There I lost all trace of 'em. I was on the headwaters of this river, so I followed it down to map some of the country."

"I catch a prisoner when I wasn't expecting to. Then at dusk some one calls out to me; I meet a girl at the landing; I find myself walking up a path with a—a girl, in a wilderness where there aren't any girls—Good Lord, I never walked in my sleep before!"

She laughed softly.

"But your prisoner?" she queried. "If you lost the trail of the bandits, how did you capture him? He isn't one of them, then?"

"Yes, he is, and I caught him by pure luck. I was ashore this noon cooking a mug-up. He danced around a bend, and I had a clean drop on him."

"I didn't know he was within a hundred

miles of me. I guess we were both knocked pop-eyed. I jumped behind a rock, but he was in a canoe on the open water. So I got him."

"Who is he?" she asked quickly, dropping her voice to a whisper.

"Don't you know about the fur-pirate outfit?"

"Not—not much."

Good gracious! A girl living there unsuspectingly within striking distance of that infamous outfit! It was high time she was being warned.

He lowered his voice so that the man ahead could not hear.

"My prisoner's name probably wouldn't mean much to you, then. I'll explain. Up north of here beyond the tree line there's a muskeg half as big as all Saskatchewan. The *métis* call it *Le Gros Marais*, or the Great Swamp.

"It's a place where a muskrat has to look sharp to find enough mud for a house. It's a wonder to me how humans can live there. But a gang of five men are hiding somewhere in it. Fur pirates, you might call 'em.

"They strike at isolated trading posts, and hijack sled parties bringing peltry down from the Arctic coast. They've got about as much mercy as a pack of February wolves. They don't make their victims walk a plank, maybe; they use a knife, and a hole in the ice.

"They're not the usual run of bush-sneaks, but intelligent men and cunning as owls. They're expert bush-lopers and water-doggers, every one of them. That's what makes them such tough customers. And they're a vile lot; that's why I'm warning you.

"They call themselves 'marsh harriers,' after the marsh hawk. It's a fitting name, for that's the only hawk that kills when he isn't hungry—for the sake of killing.

"Their leader is called the Harrier, or Le Busard. He's fifty or better. A criminal as old as he is is always case-hardened and crafty. Le Busard is more—he's diabolical. He's the shrewdest, blackest-hearted man I ever bumped into."

Distinctly he felt her quiver as he pronounced the name of Le Busard.

"Do you know him?" he broke off.

"No, no! Go on—please!"

"The rest is short and sorry. I've been after the bandits for two years. They were my special job, and I've flunked it."

"But how can that be? If all the stories of you and *le canot noir* are true, Brian—"

"You've never seen the Great Marsh, girl! I'm only human, in spite of those tall tales. I can't track a canoe on a river, and men of their kidney are wise enough not to leave signs on the tote-paths."

"Oh, I see."

She was silent a long moment.

"But if they should leave signs on the portages," she asked presently, "you could follow to their hiding place?"

"I maybe could follow to the edge of the Great Marsh. But once inside of that, there aren't even portages. It's a world of crisscross waters where a man can travel for weeks and not step out of his canoe."

"But suppose they should leave signs on the portages, and you followed and caught sight of their canoes as they were entering the Marsh. Couldn't you shadow them on to their hiding place? I mean, couldn't you follow them by sight, Brian, keeping hidden yourself?"

He wondered at her strange persistence.

"I might be able if I was real lucky."

"And your prisoner, Brian—you said he was one of the band?"

"My prisoner," Scott said slowly, "is their leader, Le Busard himself."

IV

IN the narrow pathway the girl had pressed close against him, and he felt her now go suddenly tensed and rigid. Her breath came short and quick, and she tightened her lips upon a little cry.

She had told him she did not know Le Busard; and Scott swore that if he knew what sincerity meant, her voice had been sincere when she said that.

Then what under heaven did her strange excitement mean? The mere mention of the prisoner's name a few moments ago had shaken her like an aspen leaf; and now, when she learned who the man ahead of them actually was, she had barely kept from crying out.

With an effort he forced back his questions, and gave his attention to Le Busard. He would find out everything at the cabin.

A light twinkled through the birches presently. The dim outline of a split-log dwelling rose up before him. They passed around it to the door on the east side. Flinging it open, Scott ordered his handcuffed prisoner to go in. Then he turned to the girl.

She stood in the shaft of light that streamed through the open door, and he saw her plainly. And he saw at a first glance that she was completely and utterly a stranger to him.

For a moment or two he could not look away from her eyes. They were brown, dark-brown, shaded by heavy dark lashes, and sparkling with buoyant health.

They were inscrutable eyes—behind those heavy lashes—but Scott thought he saw a wistfulness there, and a brooding worry.

They were searching his face intently again as she looked up at him, and he knew she was studying him, making her own estimate of his traits, good and bad.

Purposely he drew back to escape the witchery of those brown eyes. Arm's length from her he saw the sylphlike grace of her girlish body—so graceful and beautifully proportioned that she appeared more than medium-tall though she could have walked under his outstretched arm.

He saw her rich, warm, brown waves of hair, and her exquisitely molded oval face. The frost tang had brought roses to her cheeks, and the streaming light played in soft, golden spangles in her hair.

She was dressed, he thought, like *jolie Alouette*, that song-sweetheart of *voyageurs* on lonely, spruce-buried waters. She wore a fillet like an Indian girl's around her forehead to hold that marvelous luxury of hair in place. Her jacket and skirt were of some chestnut-brown corded material.

A *ceinture fléchée* or broad sash belt of a dozen interwoven colors was wound about her slender waist, its quilled ends dropping to her knees. On her feet were a pair of *bottes sauvages*, fur trimmed and dainty.

Her prettiness, the fact she was a stranger, the mysteries that she held for him, awoke Scott's interest and curiosity. She broke through all his habitual indifference, and his slightly sardonic attitude toward women.

He was used to thinking of them collectively, not as individuals. But now, for almost the first time in his life, he was aware of a girl's personality. She rose out of the generality of womankind and stood before him as an individual, bewitching and sweet and mysterious.

His bewildered and slightly awed glance went back to her wavy hair, and her lips, and firm little jaw. Something beside the beauty of her fascinated him. At first he

was at a loss to say what that puzzling factor was. Then very gradually it dawned upon him.

This girl's features were familiar to him—faintly and very vaguely, but yet familiar.

Had he seen her once? He debated that a moment. No. The habits of long service years had made him note and remember people. He knew that if ever he had laid eyes on her lovely face, he would never have forgotten.

The impression of her familiarity was misty and dreamlike. He might have dreamed—he thought—of such a girl as she. But no! His sober, cool-headed sense checked him up sharply.

Dreams do not materialize in flesh and blood before a man!

He ransacked his memory for a clew to that haunting familiarity. He tried to make himself believe it was just a crazy, senseless notion. But it persisted; he could not shake it off.

"You haven't changed, Brian," she broke into his puzzled thoughts. "Your eyes are a little sterner, from all you've seen and done since then, and there are tiny crowfeet of worry underneath them. But you have not changed much."

It sounded to Scott as though she had finished her study of him and was saying: "He will do!"

Her air of quiet intimacy was even more pronounced than before. There was no art or subtlety to it; she was frank and candid. And Scott, for all his bewilderment, was quite willing to accept that intimacy as an established, if somewhat puzzling fact.

"Look here," he demanded, as sternly as he could. "You seem to know everything about me, past and present. I'm going to know something about you."

"Can't you understand how I'm floundering around in a mire of puzzles at meeting a girl like you here—and at all these other circumstances? You promised."

She nodded slowly and thoughtfully.

"Yes, I promised, Brian. But not now. I want to—to think first. Afterward, when we have a few minutes alone—"

He started to object. But then his mind leaped forward to the time when his prisoner would be safely stowed for the night, and the moonlight would be filtering down through the spruces, and they would be talking outside the cabin, where Le Busard could not hear.

He agreed to wait.

They went into the cabin together. Half a dozen goose-tallow candles made it bright and cheerful. Le Busard, in the center of the room, turned to them.

V

VIVIDLY Scott remembered the queer, stunned expression on Le Busard's face six hours ago, upriver, when the handcuffs clicked. But the sight of this slender girl there in the candlelight struck the bandit ten times as dazing a blow as that very capture.

His eyes opened wide and round, and he stared at her as if she were an apparition. The blood ebbed from his face, leaving it white and drawn.

He took a step forward, toward her; his manacled hands went up to his throat; he swore a blasphemous French oath that even the fluent *métis* would rarely utter.

Then, with a great effort, he gripped himself, and was cool and impassive again.

Astounded at this strange action, Scott looked quickly at the girl. She was gazing steadily at Le Busard, and did not flinch from him. But Scott saw a thing or two. He saw her small fist clench till the knuckles were white. He saw her eyes dart fire, and her body grow tense and rigid.

Whatever her emotion was, she clamped it down as an Indian girl would have done.

With half an eye Scott saw that something stood between those two—something beyond his fathoming—something deep rooted in human passions and the most powerful human emotions.

It seemed to him that her sudden flare of emotion was bitterest hatred. But Le Busard's—no doubt in the world of that—his emotion had been livid fear.

It was inconceivable, it astounded him, that this slender, beautiful girl of scarcely twenty should have anything, even a bitter enmity, in common with this crime-calloused man of fifty. But the fact remained; he read it in their faces.

By the accident of the capture he had brought them together, and now was a bewildered spectator until the girl should explain it all. In his days his work had involved him in many a queer situation, but never one so baffling as this.

Was Beatrice lying—Scott asked himself sharply—when she said she did not know Le Busard? He believed what she had

told him. In spite of the scene he had just witnessed, he believed her. He would have staked his reputation upon her sincerity.

He had to depend at times upon his ability to judge a strange face and voice; it was as valuable to him as his deep-wood's cunning and his water-dogging skill. Seldom did his judgment go wrong; and it kept repeating to him now that the girl had been truthful with him.

Her cry, pleading with him to come to her, rang in his ears yet. Even before she knew he had a prisoner she had called to him. She wanted his help. She would clear up this whole dark puzzle. There had to be some sound explanation of it.

Impatient to have her alone and hear her story, Scott thought a moment, planning how to bring that about quickly.

The packs had to be fetched from the canoe. He could take Le Busard along with him; but coming back, carrying the two heavy packs on his shoulders, he might lose his prisoner along that trail through the dark buckbrush.

There was some amount of risk in leaving so dangerous a prisoner for a girl to guard, but it was distinctly the lesser of two dangers.

She must have guessed his thoughts.

"I'll guard your prisoner," she offered, "while you bring your packs from the landing."

Reluctantly Scott passed her his heavy belt gun. From the way she handled it she was plainly no novice with a Colt. It reassured him to see that.

"Be very, very careful with this man," he warned.

"I can shoot, Brian. Not so well as you, perhaps, but well enough if he tries to escape. I'll keep the gun pointed at him every second you are away."

Scott hurried down the dark path, lifted the canoe from the muddy rock to the moss, took out the packs, and loped back toward the cabin. As he passed the window he glanced inside.

Beatrice was standing just as he had left her. True to her promise, the heavy Colt still pointed like a menace of death at Le Busard.

But she was leaning toward the man, talking.

The sight jarred Scott as though he had been struck a blow. Brushing his scruples aside, he drew near the window and listened.

She was speaking earnestly, in quick, incisive tones, but so low that he caught only the murmuring flow of her voice. As she spoke she kept looking anxiously toward the door. She did not want Scott to return unexpectedly and discover her talking to the prisoner!

In a moment she finished, and seemed to be waiting for Le Busard's reply. The man's evil face twisted slowly into an exultant grin. He nodded, as if in agreement.

VI

As Scott stepped back from the window a riot of warring emotions surged through him. With her innocent loveliness no longer in front of his eyes, his cold reason for a moment persuaded him that she must be an ally of the bandit.

That would explain many sore puzzles; her living there on that lonely river; the tremor that ran through her when she learned who his prisoner was; the play of passion between them—put on for his benefit; and this conversation he had witnessed by sheer accident.

It would explain another puzzle which he had wrestled with all that afternoon—what was Le Busard's mission in coming down that river alone, a hundred miles from his men, risking capture, breaking all the caution habits of the bandit gang? He might have been coming down to visit her!

But there a stark question checked Scott's suspicions. If the girl were an ally of Le Busard's, why had she not allowed him to escape while his captor was gone after the packs? Surely they both realized that such a clean-cut chance would not come again.

There was no answer to that except that she was innocent. And when he stepped inside the cabin again and she handed back his gun, with a smile, Scott's doubt vanished.

He swore savagely at himself for mistrusting his judgment and for thinking the girl could be an ally of this black-hearted outlaw. His suspicion of her appeared to him like a crime. Without doubt she would explain this conversation, too.

In a corner of the cabin he trussed up Le Busard, and made him as comfortable as possible on a blanketed seat. Then, in spite of her protests he helped Beatrice get supper ready.

There were things to laugh at in this unexpected and odd situation he had met up

with. He had counted on camping in the bush that night, on cooking a quick, tasteless meal over a handful of ash-heart fire, and here he was in a cheery cabin setting a table with a cloth on it, and chatting with a girl whose eyes laughed at his clumsiness, and whose smile sent his blood galloping, and who assumed more intimacy with him in their first hour together than he had ever achieved with any other girl in his twenty-eight years!

While she finished his table-setting job, he fed Le Busard, and lit a pipe for him. Then he sat down with her to a supper of roasted willow ptarmigan, and the dainty biscuit she had made, and Arctic cranberry sauce, and steaming coffee.

He wished just then that the bandit were a thousand miles away. His roving eyes watched them like the hawk he was named after, and his presence was a black shadow. Scott tried to push him out of his mind, and give his thoughts and attentions to the girl.

The candlelight gleamed softly in her velvety treasure of hair, spangling it, touching it to a living glory. When her small hand met his, Scott colored, and a quiver leaped through him. She did not resent his gaze, but she was conscious of it, and her own color heightened.

Again and again that dreamlike feeling of her familiarity came to him, stronger than before. And some of her tricks of speech and little mannerisms seemed oddly familiar to him. He knew now positively that the feeling was not a mere crazy notion of his. But to explain it, to place her, he gave it up.

The queerest part of it all—so queer it was uncanny—he was beginning to feel as if he had known her a long time.

Her quiet assumption of intimacy might explain it partly, through the power of suggestion; but it would not explain that vague familiarity of her features, and voice, and manner.

During the meal their eyes met now and then, but neither spoke. Scott finally realized how uncivilized his gaze was. He looked away from her, and glanced around the room.

Her words "our cabin" he remembered distinctly; and now he saw she did not live there alone. On the wall beside her own small pairs were a man's snowshoes, and heavy ash skis.

There were fur clothing, new and un-

used, a gum-pot for mending birchrind canoes, and creels of bake-apple berry as a tart against a meat diet when the heavy snows came. From the rafters hung wooden pails of food, and strips of moose "jerky" for the winter at hand.

But his glance went back to the man's possessions. Several things that he saw—small articles and little gewgaws of this and that—indicated that the man was of Scott's own age or younger; young enough at least to be still interested in his personal appearance.

She had told him that her name was *Mam'selle* Beatrice; but he could not reason out who the man could be that lived there with her. The mere fact of a man there was a stab of pain to him. He resented that big footgear, and the heavy clothing. They mocked him.

She leaned forward, and startled him with a question.

"Have you finished your scrutiny, Brian? What does it tell you?"

She was smiling; but he flushed at being caught.

"Yes, I've finished. It tells me several things. You—and whoever the man is—came here early last spring. You came in by way of the Pas, where you bought your equipment.

"That pair of beaver-tail racquets was made there by Charlo Anglier; I use his racquets myself when I can get 'em."

She held her breath, her brown eyes marveling at his shrewd guesses.

"You're prepared to stay here all winter," Scott went on. "You—and the man—aren't chechahcos; you've 'seen the ice go out.' You're both thoroughly at home in the Strong-Woods, and know how to take care of yourself.

"But you at least have been Outside. You've shuffled off the thick burr of the north. Your voice is soft, but your accent is crisp as a Yank's. Am I right in all this?"

"But—but why should I tell you anything, Brian Scott, when you can use your eyes like that?"

"Because I stop there. The big questions are all dark mysteries. You promised to tell me everything. Won't you tell me now—outside where that carcajou can't listen?"

She put down her cup of coffee untasted, and slowly nodded. Scott raised his voice—for Le Busard's benefit.

"If you'll show me the pile of wood, I'll pack in enough for the night."

She led him out the door, and they stepped a few yards away from it.

VII

THE cold, coppery moon was just rising over the spruces. It was circled by three great mist rings. Upriver a wolf howled, and from a dozen points other wolves answered. It seemed that all the loneliness and wild beauty and the very soul of the Strong-Woods were packed into that long crescendo wail.

Scott had known folk who shivered whenever they heard a wolf howl; but to him the sound was always a challenge that set the blood leaping redder in his veins, and brought up memories of his thousand lone night camps with the aurora borealis swishing overhead.

A high V of migrating cranes winged south across the face of the moon, gabbling like a troupe of witches on Hallowe'en.

A white rabbit in his winter *pelage* drifted up the path toward them and leaped frightened into the junipers just as a snowy owl, tilting and banking in the pines overhead, darted down at him.

Up against the face of the heavens they heard a bird's call; the note was like the ring of a silver bell, faster and faster, till the strokes blended in one silvery tone.

Incredibly swift the bird was out of hearing, but Scott knew it was the rare Eskimo curlew, the rarest, swiftest, most beautiful-toned bird on the continent.

Though no whisper of breeze seemed stirring, the browned dead leaves still clinging to the birches rattled like the dead husks of summer. The very air had a tensed, waiting feel in it; a hushed, cowering expectancy.

They stopped with the moon shining over Scott's shoulder, and full on the girl's upturned face. In the wan, cold moonlight she seemed fragile and unreal and fairy-like. He wanted to reach out and touch her hair again, and reassure himself she was a girl of flesh and blood.

Her beauty, her nearness to him, and that unspoken intimacy surged like high wine through his blood. She was rousing more than his curiosity and his interest. Deep and powerful emotions were stirring in him and awakening. They were so strange and new that he had no word for them.

They were a discovery to him, his own personal discovery of something profound and ineffable; and therefore they seemed to him like something new in the world.

She was looking past him, up at the great mist circles. A note fraught with anxiety crept into her question.

"That is the eye of the buck, Brian. It means a blizzard. But how soon?"

"I don't know," he answered absently. "Maybe to-night or to-morrow. But I'd guess it's a couple of days off."

He was thinking of the man living there in the cabin with her. Who? The question throbbed dully in his brain. He tried to fashion it into words aloud, but his tongue felt wooden and he did not dare.

She must have divined the cause of his gloomy reverie. Her hand crept out and rested on his arm. Her words were low, but very frank; and there was a terrible earnestness in her voice.

"Those things you saw in the cabin, those things of a man's, Brian—they aren't a bar to your—to our friendship. You are mistaken. There is no bar to our friendship, Brian Scott—if only you will help me."

He stared a blank moment into her unwavering eyes. Gradually he realized all that her words implied. She needed his help; needed it desperately. She was giving him a right to her friendship if he would help her.

He burst out impetuously. "Is there anything under heaven that I wouldn't do, girl?"

"Oh, but there is! You may think not, you may say not; but there is! Your code is a stern, inexorable code, Brian. You put it above all other things—as you should. But I'm not asking you to violate it; I'm not asking something impossible of you. It's only a very, very little favor that I want now."

"What is it?"

"I promised to tell you about—myself. But now I can't; I must not. Won't you release me from that promise, Brian? You'll understand very soon why I'm asking it. That's all the favor I'm begging from you."

Scott looked down at her incredulous, doubting if he had heard her aright. The thing she begged of him seemed utterly without sense, or purpose, or reason. What earthly difference did it make whether she told him then or later?

"Why can't you tell me now?" he demanded. "You promised."

"You'll understand why not, Brian. Heaven knows I want to tell you, but I must not. When you know—everything, you will admit I'm acting wisely. Yes, I promised; and if you'll not release me, I'll—I'll make good my word."

With those questions fairly burning his brain, to be put off now was the one thing in the world Scott was loath to do for her. He had counted dead certain upon her telling him everything. For almost two hours he had been fighting down questions that cried to be answered.

Who was she? Why were her features dreamily familiar to him? What was a girl like her doing there on that wilderness river? Why had she called him in to her? What did she expect of him? What was between her and Le Busard?

"But I can't help you, girl," he objected, "if I'm all in the dark. I can't work blindfolded, can I? What's your reason for not telling me?"

"You, Brian!"

"Me—"

"Yes, you. Your service habits have too powerful a hold upon you. I sometimes think you are the prototype of all the Northwest Mounted. And it's because of your code that I can't tell you."

What under the moon, stars and vaulted heaven did his Mounted habits have to do with her not telling him? It was clear over his head and hands; another puzzle milling around in his brain!

Did the girl mean she had done some criminal thing, and that his sworn duty would force him to arrest her? It was the only explanation he could think of, and he knew it was a lie.

He swore to himself he was not going to release her from her promise; he had to know. But the next instant, as he looked steadily into her eyes, his determination wavered.

She was sternly set against telling him. If he insisted, she would make good her word. But he could foresee her drawing back from him, and see the fire in her dark-lashed eyes, and hear the stinging reproach of her lips:

"Even that small favor you refuse me!"

He debated hotly for a moment. He was convinced that she was not putting him off because of some mere whim; there was a purpose, a sensible purpose, in what

she asked. She seemed to know what she was doing.

"Beatrice," he said earnestly, "I don't want to pry into your affairs. I'm only wanting to help you. If you'll answer a single question—"

She nodded hesitantly.

"I want to know," he went on, "what's between you and Le Busard. You quivered when you found out he was my prisoner.

"When he first saw you there in the candlelight, that thick-skinned brute turned white and nearly dropped. While I was gone you talked to him, and he nodded to whatever you said."

She shrank back from him in sudden bitterness.

"You were spying on me, Brian Scott! Did you think I was a confederate of that—of that—"

"I did just what was my duty, my code as you said," Scott answered honestly. "For a moment I did think—something very wrong of you. But I cursed myself for it afterward. That is Gospel truth."

His sincerity and his candor disarmed her. Her hand crept back to his wrist, and lay lightly upon it.

"I know you had to do it, Brian," she said contritely. "Forgive me. You were going to ask me a question—"

"Yes. When and where and how did you meet this man Le Busard?"

"We never met. I never laid eyes upon him. He never saw me before to-night."

Her words staggered Scott. Desperately, in spite of them, he clung to his faith in her truthfulness.

"Wh-aa-t! But look here! I saw with my own eyes—"

"We never met face to face before," she repeated simply. "I've heard of him. I'm aware of several things about him that even you, Brian, do not know. That explains why I was excited when you said so calmly, 'My prisoner is Le Busard.'

"Then, there in the cabin, when he turned and saw me, he took me for—for another person. He was mistaken, ghastly mistaken for a moment.

"You surely noticed how quickly he gripped himself again when he saw his mistake. That explains his agitation. This too is Gospel truth, Brian. Now are you going to release me from that promise?"

She was on tiptoe again, begging him, pleading with her eyes. Her hand crept down to his, and her clasp tightened.

In that roil of bewildering questions a couple of facts were beginning to stand out clear to Scott. The girl was in trouble, desperate trouble, and was trusting him.

Another thing: Le Busard was a factor in that trouble. Her words might be true enough; she might never have met the bandit leader; but all her agitation and the man's livid fear at sight of her—all that meant something.

Just now she had evaded the real question. She might never have met Le Busard, but that did not answer the question of what stood between them.

Scott debated whether to make her tell him everything then and there. She had hinted that the crisis of her trouble was very near. He would know all about it soon enough—if he stayed there at the cabin.

The first blizzard was at hand; he would need toboggan and racquets for the overland trip; he could make them easier at her cabin than on the trail. It was in fact his duty to stay, under the circumstances.

He went on piling up reasons; his real one he did not admit even to himself. But he came to his decision; he would stay and find out her trouble, and see her through it.

"Will you release me from my promise, Brian?" she pleaded.

"Yes!"

The next moment was overwhelmingly confused, and ecstatic, and blurred with Scott. It was gone in one wild beat, but the memory of it lingered with him all the rest of his days.

It was only afterward, when Beatrice had gone out of his life as suddenly as she had come into it and she seemed a beautiful vision he was hopelessly following—it was only afterward in lonely, anguished hours that Scott realized the sweetness of that moment.

Later all the details came trooping back to him one by one. How—when he released her from the promise—her arms went impulsively around his neck, and she drew his head down, and her slender body pressed for an instant against his own, and her lips, meeting his in a warm, clinging kiss, were murmuring, "Oh, but I knew you would!"

Another thing he remembered afterward, though in that moment it was lost in the surge of his emotions and the madness of their kiss. When her body pressed against

his he felt the unmistakable form and hard outlines of a small automatic revolver carried in the *ceinture fléchée* around her waist.

It was a trifling circumstance, overshadowed by a dozen impressions then; but later the merciful memory of it saved Scott from despair.

VIII

SHE slipped away from him into the cabin. With a big armload of split blocks, he followed. She had disappeared.

For the first time he saw that a door opened beside the great hearth, leading back into a very tiny room—her room. Mechanically, with the madness still in his blood, he began preparing for the night.

In a few minutes she came out into the hearth room, bringing him an extra pair of fluffy, white H.B. blankets, and a glossy musk-ox robe to lie on.

She had been combing out her hair. It dropped in wavy lustrous beauty to her knees, and almost hid her. To Scott it was a marvel how she could carry that treasure of heavy hair, and keep her head poised so proudly.

He noticed the smirking smile on Le Busard's face, and the coarse look in his eyes as he stared at the girl. The look made Scott see red. It reminded him of a brute licking his chops. If Le Busard had not been his prisoner and bound, Scott would have knocked him down.

When she bade Scott good night, and closed the door of her room again, his preparations were short and swift, for he was paddle-weary, and somehow very sleepy. He spread the musk-ox robe on the floor in the middle of the room, arranged her blankets and his own, and led Le Busard to the pallet.

Her words about his Mounted habits being strong with him were pretty much the truth, he thought. He had to smile at the way he was proving what she had said. One of those habits was to get his man; another, even stronger than the first, was *to keep him after he was captured*. He meant to take no chances with the bandit that night.

Snuffing out all the candles except the two longest ones over the hearth, and then lying down beside his prisoner, he locked Le Busard's ankle to his own ankle and Le Busard's wrist to his wrist.

On long trips like that, a man could not

stay awake at night and travel by day; it was physically impossible. The double manacle binding prisoner and captor solved that difficulty; it allowed the latter to sleep peacefully all night without fear of losing his man. Any considerable stir of either would wake up the other.

Instead of putting the key in his pocket where Le Busard might conceivably get hold of it during the night, Scott tossed it twelve feet away upon the hearth mantelpiece. Then he closed his eyes.

He wanted to stay awake awhile and think over the strange circumstances he had been suddenly flung into. There was some explanation, some sensible explanation, behind all the queer puzzles. They all hung together, and he believed that a little quiet thinking would show him the peg they hung on.

He wanted to live over again that moment outside in the moonlight, and hear Beatrice's voice again as she told him there would be no bar to their friendship; and to figure out this strange new thing which had come into his life so suddenly.

It was always like that, he thought; the great, significant things, as if preparing hidden and unseen, burst upon us in a moment—not like the long ordinary days and seasons and years when a person's life runs along on a prosaic level, but in high-pitched moments, in sudden revelations—

Scott's thoughts wandered so badly that the sentence was never completed. He was sleepy, terrifically sleepy. It was because of those endless, toiling portages of the last twelve hours, he believed. A refrain of the day's work beat in his brain as he dropped off:

White water, tote-path, *embarque*—

Hours later Sergeant Scott came slowly back to consciousness. It was not his usual clear-headed awakening, but seemed instead like fighting endlessly upward through dark waters to the surface.

He was first aware of a parched throat, and a throbbing headache, and slight nausea. He opened his eyes. The two candles still burned on the mantel. The hearth fire had sunk to a bed of glowing coals. He twisted his head, and looked to his left.

He laughed. He blinked his eyes and laughed again, as though the delusion were a good joke. Then he touched the crumpled blankets beside him to prove his vision was lying.

His face turned suddenly white, his laugh ended in an oath, he wiped his hand across his eyes, and sat up with a jerk.

The blankets beside him were empty!

He was on his feet like a shot. The fog cleared out of his brain. He steeled himself against the panic which gripped him at sight of the empty blankets. With the manacles still dangling from his own ankle and wrist, he took a first swift look around.

Le Busard was not in the outer room. One glance told that. Before making his get-away he had lain for several hours on the musk-ox robe, for the fur showed the plain impress of his body.

Scott whirled and leaped past the hearth into the other room. A candle burned there, too; and he saw that *Beatrice was gone*.

The wall bunk was disarranged, she had slept in it part of the night; but she was gone. The blankets, the little hollow where she had lain, were warm yet to his touch; but she had vanished into the night.

A clammy sweat broke out on Scott. He stumbled back into the hearth room, and stood rocking in the middle of the floor, trying desperately to realize what had happened.

The glittering key lying on the musk-ox robe caught his eye. Le Busard could never have dragged him over to the hearth and secured that key, even though his captor were sleeping a drugged sleep.

He knew from his parched throat and reeling senses that he had been drugged. He remembered now that she had left her coffee untasted, and that the bandit had refused his too, claiming he wanted to sleep.

They had prearranged all that during their talk! In the night she had come out and unlocked the prisoner, and escaped with him!

In a blind daze Scott freed himself from the empty manacles, and lit the other candles. As they spluttered and then burned steadily, he saw something sticking against the heavy door.

He stumbled across to it. A deerfoot knife pinned a note there for him, a note in Le Busard's bold print:

FOLLOW US TO LE GROS MARAIS, YELLOW-STRIPES, IF YOU ARE MAN ENOUGH. THE DOGS ARE HUNGRY.

Above the taunt and the sinister threat of the hungry dogs, one single word of the message stood out significant:

Us!

Slumped down at the block table, with his face in his hands, Scott sat fighting till the worst of the dazing blow passed, and he could think again.

He could not realize that Beatrice had duped, and drugged, and betrayed him. There were the stark facts; his being drugged, her unlocking the prisoner, her disappearance.

But he could not put them together and realize their totality. He could not believe what the brutal facts said of her.

He cursed himself for his weakness. He wrestled it more bitterly than with his own black despair at losing his prisoner. He tried to anathematize her as traitress. It was a futile, an impossible task.

He could smell the perfume of her hair yet, and feel her arms around his neck; and the sweetness of her kiss still lingered on his lips.

Always when he finished damning her in his sober mind, a small insistent voice kept saying that the facts lied. It seemed to him that if she were faithless, then there was no faith or honor or innocence in the whole world.

One thing he remembered which helped him believe in her. Before she knew that Le Busard was his prisoner, before she even knew he had a prisoner, she had called to him, and had wanted his help.

His help for what? She had told him nothing; he could not remotely guess. And why had she gone away with the bandit? It was all beyond his power to fathom.

Gradually a belief grew upon him. It was a lame and halt and blind belief, but it grew to a certainty with him. The something which stood between her and Le Busard had driven her to do what she had done. Behind it all some dark mystery lurked.

Still dazed by the blow, he did not know which way to turn, or what to do, or where to take up the problem. But she had been counting on his help, and he would do all that lay in his power, however blinded and puzzled he was, to save her—to save, or to avenge her terribly.

He jumped to his feet. The note said they had headed for the big muskeg. With the blizzard coming, Le Busard would take the most direct path. That was upriver.

He looked at his watch—an hour till dawn. They had not been gone much over an hour; he might overtake them before his enemy could gain the first tributary.

He caught up his rifle and belt-gun, buckling this on while he ran like a deer down the path to the landing. Groping in the willows he found his canoe; but as he felt along its side he groaned.

In three places it had been ripped from gunwale to keel by a knife. The other birchrind was gone; his own useless; his chances of overtaking Le Busard completely spikèd. The bandit had expected him to make a mad dash in pursuit!

IX

SCOTT sat down in the darkness, wrestling with the demons of despair. The bandit leader had escaped—escaped clean. With all those forks and portages upriver there was no hope of pursuing him now and saving Beatrice.

The logical thing was to go back to the post, report, and take his medicine. Though it meant his reputation, the hard-won stripes on his arm, and all that he had built up through long years of service, at least he would not be branded as a deserter.

But chevrons, reputation, and the loathed stigma of desertion counted for little in his grim debate now. They were rough-and-ready, worldly things; Beatrice was apart from them and beyond them.

She seemed to have come to him out of the Strong-Woods like a beautiful vision, and vanished into nothingness again. She had come as an answer to a hidden desire and need of his.

All his fierce energy, which arduous patrolling could not snub, an unsettled restlessness which work could not down, a vague but profound feeling of something lacking in his life—she was the answer to all them.

Now that she had gone out of his life, he realized that his desire, and hopeless longing, and his reverence for her was love, and that returning to the post without her, without knowing what had happened to her and avenging her, was utterly impossible.

His despair passed finally and gave way to a grim determination. Not to head south without Beatrice, leaving her in the hands of Le Busard. But north! North to *Le Gros Marais*.

He had been absent from duty for two weeks now; he would be absent all winter. Through the Moons of Hardening Ice and Hoar Frost and Big Snows, till the Moon of the Brown Eagle came again in the

spring, he would comb that huge muskeg country in blizzard and still cold like a stalking vengeance; and if Arctic storm or the white wolf pack got him, at least it would never be known at the post that he had lost his prisoner.

Slowly he lifted the black canoe to his shoulder and carried it back to the cabin, where he set grimly to work with gum-pot and canvas to mend it.

Into his packs, when he buckled them up again, went heavy winter clothing from the wall pegs, and extra cartridges, and twenty pounds of *robibbo*, a concentrated food made of moose pemmican, flour and pea-meal pounded together.

Before leaving the cabin finally, he looked around for map, or piece of writing, or clew that might help him.

The outer room yielded nothing at all save the initials *J. H.* on a rifle stock. He broke the rubber endplate to look inside the hole, and found some matches in a waterproof case, a tiny luminous compass, a bottle of pain-killer; but no name, or clew.

He went into her room, and for the first time had a good look around. It was a very tiny little niche, scarcely ten feet by eight. In spite of the rough, split-log walls, the room was snug and cozy, and exquisitely feminine.

A faint perfume like that in her hair pervaded it. Her nightgown hung on a wall peg; beneath it a pair of fur slippers for house wear. Her bunk was mattresséd with spruce-tips woven together as only a sourdough knows how; and over these were several white, soft blankets.

Shamefacedly he searched through the room, and through her clothing. On a shelf he found a copy of the Mounted Police reports for the preceding year. A leaf was turned down at the place where Inspector Donaldson reported the failure of Sergeant Scott's patrols against the fur bandits of the Great Marsh.

It occurred to Scott that she might have got her information about him from that pamphlet. But no! She had mentioned pictures and descriptions, and had showed an intimate knowledge of him which she never could have gleaned from that terse, unfriendly report. She knew him from some other—some very personal—angle.

In a jacket pocket he found a picture of her in sport skirt and tennis slippers and a sweater, and in the background were a palm tree and a giant cactus.

By holding the card to the light he made out the watermark of a photography company in Los Angeles. It astonished him; he had thought of her as a living part of the Strong-Woods. He would have sworn she had been born and reared to them.

The picture was so clear, it caught so much of her laughter and zest that it seemed almost alive. He could see her lips moving; could hear her saying—"Oh, but I knew you would!"

Between the leaves of the Mounted report he found another thing which astounded him. It was a picture of a girl dressed in the clothes of a quarter century ago—a wasp-waisted skirt that swept the ground, a pair of button slippers peering out from under it, and yards upon yards of airy laces and frills. But what struck him all amaze—the picture was a likeness of Beatrice!

At first he thought she had taken it as a jest—dressing the part. But the picture was as old as the costume, a tin-print faded and browned with age.

He thought then that it could not be a picture of Beatrice; but he held the two prints side by side, and swore the old tin plate was a likeness of her.

"Good Lord!" he breathed, utterly stumped. "When that picture was taken, she couldn't have been born yet. But—but it's her!"

Again, as he gazed at the things in his hand, the feeling of her unreality crept over him. In his thoughts the evening before he had likened her half jestingly to *jolie Alouette*, the fur *voyageur's* mythical sweetheart for two long centuries.

The comparison now came back to him in a different sense, a serious and odd and other-worldly sense.

The raucous scolding of a whisky jack outside recalled him from his bewildered groping for an explanation. He slipped the pictures into an inner pocket, lest they were all he would ever have of her.

He cut his search short, for her clothes, and the faint violet perfume, and the laughing picture of her in the sport clothes brought back the poignant memories of last evening.

And they reminded him, too, that she was in Le Busard's power now, being taken to the rendezvous in the big muskeg.

If it had been any other man who held her, Scott would have cherished some hope that her own sweet girlishness and the

Strong-Woods chivalry which many a time had amazed him in rough, shaggy-barked men, would have been protection enough for her.

But he knew Le Busard too well to hope that. He had traced the man back two or three years before the time he became leader of the bandits. He knew of several deeds at lonely cabins, vivid commentaries on the man's evil abandon, deeds that no *métis* or woods-born Canuck would ever perpetrate.

It seemed to him that Le Busard, for all his craftiness in forest or on the waterways, was alien to certain codes, a foreigner. And the man's physical make-up, as Scott studied him the day before, bore out that impression.

The gray dawn broke while he carried the canoe and then the packs down to the river.

As he set the black canoe to water, he saw a thing there on the mud of the landing that brought his heart into his mouth.

A few words, traced with the toe of a small *botte sauvage*.

X

Two of the letters had been trampled out by his own boots, and the last portion of the message had been blotted out by the smear of the other canoe being slid into the water. Only four words remained:

FOLLOW C NOE TR CKS. WATCH

Like a man petrified Scott stared at the message for a moment; and then, as all that those mud letters meant came flooding in upon him, he yelled aloud. A wild elation swept over him.

She had left a message for him! Over and over and over again that thought quivered through him like a flash of fire. She had been watched in the cabin; she dared not, there; but here on the river under cover of darkness she had left him a token! A pledge of faith, of her honor, of their comradeship in the battle with the fur pirates!

He thanked Heaven that when cold, sober reason called her "traitress," he had clung to his faith in her.

For a little while Scott could realize nothing but that she had left him this message, and that his judgment of her face and voice was upheld and that his deepest instincts as a man had been justified.

But then he began to think of the message itself. *Follow canoe tracks. Lord, he*

had spent two futile years trying to follow canoe tracks! Without the rest of her message, the words were mockery.

Watch—watch what? She had given him some directions, some help to guide him, but that was irrecoverably blotted out. He would have given his three stripes cheerfully to know what the mud smear had cut off.

He crouched down and searched till his eyes ached to discover if a faint impression or a word were traceable yet. But all save the first four words were destroyed.

One thing stood out clear. Whatever lay behind her action, whatever desperate thing she had attempted, she was counting on his help in her whole scheme. She was trusting to him, banking on him.

From her first cry out of the spruce blackness last night to this message on the mud landing, he saw now she had been expecting him to aid her.

She was relying on him to follow.

Vaguely at first, then more and more clearly as he recalled her words and her anxious questions, he began to see at least the rough outlines of what she wanted him to do. For a moment the prospect unnerved him. What she expected of him seemed utterly impossible.

Her faith in his powers was colossal. She had heard so many tall stories about him that she thought he could do anything. It was a superman's task even if luck broke his way at every turn.

He shuddered at the thought of failing. She had gambled upon his ability, staking the fearful wager of her own self. It seemed to Scott that she had simply flung herself away on a desperate and utterly hopeless gamble.

But the thought of her in the evil power of Le Busard, in the rendezvous of the bandits, nerved him as inspectorship or reputation could never have done, and he rose in grim determination to the work ahead.

Swiftly balancing the packs, he stepped in, took up the paddle and skirled the canoe upstream toward the north.

At the first portage three miles above the cabin Scott drove his canoe ashore and sprang out to examine the tote-path. It was a game trail worn by hoof and pad, and leading close along the water edge. He walked the length of it, bent over, looking for signs.

A band of caribou had passed there dur-

ing the early night, and trampled the path into mud. If a human had used that trail, the tracks would have been as plain to him as if laid down in new-fallen snow.

But there were no signs. A hundred times on portages like that he had searched carefully for clews, and found none. The bandits were all too wise for that. Always they circled back through the spruces, walking over the carpet of moss; and hit the river above the *embarque*.

As Scott pondered that and looked upstream, a white object fluttering a bowshot away in a juniper caught his glance. Impetuously he broke through the buckrush, and pulled it from the juniper.

A portion of a woman's handkerchief—dainty, violet-scented, Beatrice's! The faint odor of it set the blood pounding madly in his veins.

He had guessed her plan! Guessed it in spite of the message blotted out! His mind jumped to what the rest of that message must have been. *Watch—watch for signs on the portages!*

He remembered her anxious questions about his ability to trail the bandits, remembered how insistent she had been about telltale tracks, and her anxiety about the blizzard swooping.

He could fill in the outlines of her plan now. She was trying to lead him to the hidden rendezvous. She was going to leave signs on the portages.

For that superbly cunning reason she had "played up" to Le Busard and given herself into his power, and pitched off with him. If her plan worked, for the first and only time in his two years' futile chase Scott would have signs to guide him!

But it was a fearful question with Scott whether she could carry that plan through. The bandit leader had passed there with her while it was still dark. It had been easy enough then to leave that bold sign.

But when daylight came and he would be watching her, and the river began forking into its dozen headwater branches, how under heaven would even this quick-witted little bush-loper be able to leave sure, plain clews to guide the man following? Scott knew that he himself could never do a thing like that!

Racing back to his canoe, he loped with it over the tote-path, splashed knee-deep into the water, gave the boat a shove, and leaped in.

As he darted upstream, swiftly as a Chip-

pewyan woods-runner in the frailest birch-rind craft, he took stock of his chances. One lone thing was in his favor; he could paddle faster than Le Busard.

But he would have to stop on every portage and search. The minutes, the quarter-hours lost when river forks and white water came thick and fast, might more than offset his greater speed. And the canoe ahead had two and maybe three hours' lead on him.

He had to whittle that lead down to nothing. At the marsh edge all signs would cease. By to-morrow afternoon Le Busard would be entering the huge swampland.

Before the trail was lost in the thousand channels and creeks of the Great Marsh, *he had to catch sight of that canoe.*

Now and then he glanced at the sky, noting the ominous signs, praying for the storm to hold off. Grayish clouds were scudding down from the Barren Grounds.

In the northeast sky hung a brick-dust sheen, sure herald of a savage woolly-whipper roaring down from higher latitudes. Overhead his ears heard the shrill, incessant whining of angry winds preparing; and the wind that brushed his face was as keen as the lash of a whip.

Gradually, very gradually, the clouds were thickening and growing darker of color. When that overhead whining dropped to earth, blanketing the country with snow, the signs she had left would be blotted out in half an hour.

On the second portage ten miles above the cabin he found another portion of her handkerchief. Crumpling it into his jacket pocket he darted on upstream. On the next two *sauts* there were no signs at all.

No tributary streams came in along those reaches; there was but one canoe route. He wondered if Le Busard had been watching her, or if she purposely had left no signs.

Without stopping he whipped on up the spruce-buried river.

Twice that morning he passed the rotting skeleton poles of a cluster of old wigwams. Once he came to an Indian encampment so fresh that smoke still spiraled from the tepees.

A Chippewyan's stalwart paddle in the prow of his canoe and a pair of keen black Chippewyan eyes on the portages would have been a godsend to him. Yesterday when he passed, the Indians had still been there; but the tepees were empty now.

His shouts flounced back at him from the walls of spruce, and a lone "cracky" howling dismally on the bank told that Scott's dusky friends had left southwest for the trading posts to "get debt" for the long white winter.

On higher he passed an occasional bear-skull stuck up on a sapling, Manitou offering of the primitive savages. He passed old fish weirs and a spot where a great heap of caribou antlers and skulls showed that the Chippewyan spearing-surround had taken heavy toll of the dun herd.

He passed through an immense drift of migrating caribou, where countless thousands of the animals, gathered together from the Barren Ground wastes, were swimming the river and working *en travers* on southward to the snow-padded depths of the Strong-Woods where they yarded.

But thereafter the caribou failed, and even the Indian signs stopped, and he entered into a no-man's land of appalling loneliness.

At noon, because it was wisdom to do it, he stopped twenty minutes to eat, and to rest briefly. An hour after that he came to a great Y-fork of the river.

Here was the first stark test of Beatrice's ability to leave signs.

There was no portage at the fork; both channels were deep canoe-water; she had no chance under the sun to leave a clew there. But Scott had thought of such a dilemma, and laid his plans beforehand.

Whipping up the left branch to the first *saut*, he searched the river bank thoroughly for signs. There were none. Dropping back to the fork, shooting up the right branch, he landed at the first portage, and crept on hands and knees along the water-edge.

The mud shingle showed nothing at all; there was no evidence of a canoe having touched. Hardly ten feet from where he started searching a line of rocks looking for all the world like stepping stones led from the knee-deep water back to the mossy bank. These were granite stones, cleansoured and innocent of signs.

But *between* two of them—so faint that it was all but invisible—he made out the light impress of a small *botte sauvage!*

XI

How she had managed that under the sharp eyes of the bandit leader himself was a miracle of miracles to Scott. Perhaps she

had been talking to him when she made that track; smiling her bewitching smile at him; fanning the man's passion till he forgot caution and suspicion! However she managed it, there was her footprint pointing the way!

Half a dozen times that afternoon at forks where the trail would have been hopelessly lost otherwise, Scott came across the signs she had left to guide him, a footprint on the mud, freshly broken sticks, juniper boughs twined together, and once a portion of her handkerchief in the cleft of a tree.

He marveled at her woods-cunning. She was matching wits with the shrewdest man Scott had ever come up against, and was beating him at every turn! There was not a man in the Mounted Service who could do what she was doing.

Toward four o'clock he came upon a footprint so fresh that it made him jump. They were not more than half an hour ahead of him. He reached for his rifle, and laid it beside him in the canoe, and at the river windings he searched the stretches ahead before skirling out upon the open water.

But it was not part of his plan to catch up with them and force a battle with Le Busard. He believed now that he could follow to the rendezvous and capture the whole gang.

At the next fork his confidence was staggered. Whipping up the left branch to the first portage, as he had done repeatedly that day, he searched and found no signs. The right branch showed nothing at all, though he searched there for half an hour. A cold despair swept over him.

Had Le Busard detected her at last, and stopped the telltale signs?

He went back to the left portage and examined the water edge on both sides, up and across and down, holding himself grimly to a careful job, wasting an hour that seemed a dozen years to him.

And he found her sign just before twilight, a stick lying on a rock, with another stone on top to weigh it down and to catch his eye.

While Le Busard had been reloading the canoe, she had managed that! But they were an hour and a half in the lead again, and the early twilight was shutting swiftly down.

In another hour Scott was forced to stop at a place where the river branched in three directions.

He felt reasonably sure that Le Busard would stop too. Except for the blizzard, the bandit had no particular cause to hurry; he did not know he was being followed. Besides, the canoes had covered two full days' travel in that one day; and flesh and blood has its limit of endurance.

Yanking two fat connies out of the river and pulling up some potatolike bulbs of the bracken fern, Scott dug a pit under a tamarack, put in hot stones from his cone of fire, piled wet moss on them, laid on his fish and bulbs, and covered the pit over with moss and clay.

While the meal cooked he climbed a tall white spruce to its swaying top, and hung up there an hour, searching the dark stretches up the channels for a glint of a camp fire.

He saw none; he had had small hope of seeing any, for the bandits always made fire holes. That was one of their cautious habits.

After eating his meal he lashed his packs to the tops of pliant saplings and flipped them up out of reach of prowling bears or carcajous. Then, setting the lightened canoe to water again, he paddled silently away up the middle channel.

If Le Busard had camped near the river, the taint of his camp fire smoke would be hanging on the taut, crisp air, and could be detected. Or a fox might be barking at the human intruders, or their voices might be audible.

He worked ten miles up the middle channel without finding a trace of their camp; and while the moon climbed to zenith and started slipping down the western sky, he worked the other two branches for miles above the forks, all to no purpose.

At two o'clock, back at his camp, he rolled up in his blanket and fought for sleep. He needed it for what lay ahead of him the next day. The great test would come then. Tree line was but thirty miles away; the edge of the Great Marsh was twenty odd miles beyond that.

Within fifty miles he would have to unravel all the portage puzzles, and cut down nearly a two hour lead, and be within sight of the other canoe when it entered the huge swamp land.

But he was too keyed up, in too anguished a suspense, to sleep. With the blanket wrapped around his shoulders he sat on the dark river bank, thinking.

Moon and starlight had been blotted out

by the lowering pall of clouds. As he looked up at the velvety black heavens a single flake of snow fell wet and cold upon his face.

The overhead whining had dropped lower, till it was whipping now through the tops of the columnar spruces. *Keechee Kewatin*, Chippewyan god of the North Wind, was untying his bag of caribou leather and letting loose his first storm.

During those long dark hours while he sat waiting for the dawn, Scott's mind went back to the time, two years ago, when the fur bandits first started their depredations down in the Strong-Woods near Fort Resolution. That was before Le Busard came.

They were crafty bush sneaks and skillful water doggers, those three *métis* and the white man with them; far shrewder than the average bush-loping criminals. But Scott knew he would have caught them speedily if they had stayed there in the timbered country, his own beloved Strong-Woods.

Then Le Busard appeared out of nowhere and became their leader, and took them northeast to *Le Gros Marais*, where nothing short of a fleet of airplanes could ever have discovered their rendezvous.

It was a master stroke, but only the first of Le Busard's stratagems, for he stood head and shoulders above even his crafty band.

Under his leadership they became supremely cunning and merciless and efficient. They stopped their smaller depredations, and robbed only when they could make a big scoop of peltry.

In winter time they struck during araging blizzard, on a *jour à poudre*, or "powder day," when the wind was full of whipping snow spume and hoarfrost, and their tracks were wiped out in a twinkling.

In summer time they escaped through the network of waterways to their retreat in the swamp land. They left no survivors to follow or to describe them; a human life to them meant less than an otter's skin. Only a few stray glints of information had Scott found out about them.

In those two whole years Le Busard had made but one false step. That was in coming down the river alone by daylight. It was a puzzle to Scott; he could not begin to figure out what the man's purpose had been.

But that mystery was small and inconsequential compared with the dozen others.

During the silent hours, Scott tried to work out an explanation of all that had happened last night in the cabin. No theory he could concoct would explain everything.

He tried to figure out why Beatrice's features seemed vaguely familiar to him, for that might possibly be a key to many things. One by one he groped back through the years clear to his boyhood days in Montreal, but was utterly unable to place her.

The mystery of the two pictures, each of the same girl, but taken a quarter century apart, was too much for his mind even to grapple with; he simply pushed it aside.

It was very clear that she had some deep purpose in leading him to the rendezvous. Her reason was something more than a mere desire to see him capture the bandits.

What was so terribly vital a thing with him could be only of mild interest to her. She would never have staked herself on so wild a gamble unless some powerful reason of her own had driven her to it.

Whatever that reason was, it was bound up with the mystery of what stood between her and Le Busard. The more he thought of it, the more incredible it seemed to Scott that her life could ever have touched that of such a man, even remotely. But it was so; it had to be so. Back of it all there was some explanation.

He was no longer worried about that explanation. His job was not to harass himself with puzzles now, but to throw himself with every atom of strength and brain into that chase, and *cling to that trail*. His fight and her fight were one now, to reach that rendezvous.

The thought of her camped somewhere only a few miles away with Le Busard was maddening to him. For the first time he remembered the belt-gun hidden beneath her *ceinture fléchée*. It was some comfort to know she was secretly armed.

XII

MORNING broke slowly, a somber gray. When he set the canoe to water, he had to break scum ice reaching out from the bank. In the middle of the stream the surface was covered with candle ice, peculiar crystal daggers which had formed on the bottom during the night, and were rising to the surface now.

He remembered the Chippewyan saying that candle ice forms only once each year; that the next night all the waters

would catch over solidly. The overhead whining was low and ominous; little snow flurries fell at times; by night, without the ghost of a doubt, the blizzard would be roaring down across the wastes.

In the middle one of the three channels he found her token at the first portage, and flung himself on north upon the trail. At every fork where he searched in feverish haste, he found the signs she had left to guide him.

They were bolder now, as if Le Busard no longer was watching her closely; but even so, every fork meant a handful of precious minutes wasted in searching both branches.

For all his desperate haste on the open reaches, the trail seemed to get no fresher. He was twelve or fifteen miles behind. Le Busard, too, was hurrying—to reach home before the blizzard struck.

All that morning the river climbed steadily toward a low watershed, and branched till it was a mere creek. The Strong-Woods rapidly were breaking up into scattered patches of wind-gnarled balsams.

The moss was giving way to lichens and Eskimo grass and cranberry shrubs. As the watershed loomed up closer and closer, the creek finally dwindled to nothing, ending abruptly in a tiny lake.

With the black canoe on his shoulder, Scott raced up the mile-long slope, over the crest, and down to the next paddle water, following the tracks of Le Busard and Beatrice.

He had reached the edge of the Barren Grounds; the Great Marsh lay twenty miles north. Night was less than five hours away, and the blizzard—only the *Keechee Keewatin* knew when that would swoop.

He had to catch sight of that canoe before it entered the Great Marsh!

Goading himself to the last supreme dash, he started down that unknown river leading into the huge swamp. He whipped through lakes where once there had been forests; where groups of dead and blackened trees, lifeless for centuries, still held their arms above the water for the herons to build their rookeries upon.

He whipped past little mud volcanoes whose magnetic masses underneath spun his compass needle crazily. He whipped past a dozen portages, reading Beatrice's signs as he sped by.

At mid afternoon even the groups of blackened trees stopped. The creek he followed had swelled into a river, deep and blue and without a current.

An hour later, eight miles north of the last portage sign, he ran squarely into a star-shaped lake where five channels branched off in every direction.

He had reached the edge of the Great Marsh—and had not overhauled the other canoe! There were no more portages, no more signs; he had come to the end of the chase, had lost.

On the opposite side of the lake a mud volcano stood up a hundred feet above the tundra. In a cold sweat of despair and defeat, Scott drove his canoe across to it, and climbed to its cup-shaped peak. His last hope was to sight them with his service glasses from the eminence.

He gazed out over an amphibious country, neither land nor water; a weird and desolate world of leaden waters under leaden skies, stretching to the remotest gray distance, a far-flung labyrinth of flat lakes and dead channels, of rivers and creeks that hardly knew which way to flow, of muskeg—an illimitable, wild and lonely expanse of it—where only willows and the rank, high marsh reed grew, and where the soil gurgled and quivered under a footstep.

Though the earlier migrants already had left, the swamp was still the home of water-fowl in teeming myriads. Marsh harriers, cruel and murderous, beat on hungry wing over the tall flag; higher up, whole colonies of black tern and inland gulls circled and whined like lost souls.

Flocks of teal and white wavies, pintails and golden plovers, the snowy crane and the brown pelican, skittered from lake to lake, restless and anxious to be gone.

A thousand swift-flying wedges of the gray goose, the mallard, and shoveler, and widgeon were penciled in big V's against the low-scudding clouds.

The little granite ridges sticking up like backbones out of some of the lakes were covered with countless colonies of birds.

The gusts of wind swept up to Scott a strange babel of noises: the booming thunder of the bitterns, the gabble of geese, the sonorous trumpet call of the swan, the loon's loud laugh, the flacker, squawk, and honking of the migrant myriads in confused uproar. They were waiting to be swept south on the wings of the blizzard. By morning they would all be gone.

From where he stood on the volcano Scott could see a dozen different snow flurries sweeping here and there across the Great Marsh, and see the flags waving like a brown loping sea. At his elevation the wind whistled around him laden with snow pellets that stung like tiny daggers.

Methodically, one by one, for all his agony of suspense, he swept his service glasses up each of the channels leading out of the star-shaped lake, and followed them back as far as his vision reached.

And one by one, as the channels showed him nothing of Le Busard's craft, his hopes were snuffed out. In all the wilderness of waters that his glasses covered he caught no glimpse of a canoe.

It was then, when his glasses came slowly down, and he groaned in the bitterness of despair, it was then that his bare eyes were drawn to a strange spectacle scarcely two miles north of him.

A great flock of white wavies, ten or twelve thousand of them, were rising out of the flags there, looking at that distance like a huge puff of feathers exploding.

Something more than ordinary had frightened them.

Scott whipped up his glasses. The weaving layers upon layers of wavies cut off his vision for a few seconds; but quickly they breasted high up over the flags, and wheeled west in a heavy white cloud.

At his first glance Scott saw nothing save a little creek connecting one of the channels with another lake system to the north.

But at his second glance, as he focused again and drew the creek up close to him, and probed through the screen of the highest reeds, he saw a canoe gliding up the creek—a canoe with two human occupants—Le Busard, and a slender, girlish figure in the prow.

XIII

In his desperate haste he had come faster than he thought, covering two miles that afternoon to his enemy's one. While he had been searching the marsh miles away to the gray horizon, they had been almost beneath him, hidden by the flags along the creek.

They were so very near that it startled him, and he crouched down lest his enemy should look back and see him.

For a moment or two he watched the canoe. As it passed a spot where the creek bank was free of reeds, he saw Beatrice

turn slightly, and look back toward the star-shaped lake.

He could guess the fearful question trembling on her lips. Had he fulfilled his part and followed, and was he watching her at that moment?

Looking down at the crisscross waterways, Scott mapped them indelibly in his mind, and planned what to do. He had to keep very close to that canoe from now on. It might cut aside into one of a thousand canoe paths, and be lost in three minutes.

The blizzard and the early night were only a couple of hours away. But he dared not follow directly behind the enemy canoe and close enough to keep it in sight, or Le Busard would look back on the straight channels and creeks, and see him.

And if he scared up any waterfowl, the bandit leader would see that as surely as he himself had seen the white wavies flush.

He thought out the problem quickly, for the canoe ahead was traveling swiftly to reach home before the blizzard struck in its fury.

Down the slope in a dozen jumps, he cut off an armful of willow sticks, laced them together crudely in the form of a barrel, set them in the canoe, and placed reeds around them till he had a blind that totally concealed him.

Darting up the channel to the creek mouth, he followed a mile behind the enemy canoe, watching the water birds that it flushed.

When Le Busard reached the next lake to the north and entered another channel, Scott whipped aside into a waterway paralleling the one his enemy had taken; and then, overhauling the bandit at every stroke, he cut down the lead till he was up even.

The shoals of waterfowl that he paddled through merely swam aside or skittered out of the canoe's path. But out of the other channel, barely six hundred yards away, ducks and geese and wavies, flushing and whirling away over the flags, told him at every rod just where his enemy was!

Out of one lake system into another, through a maze of creeks and rivers and lakes, he followed steadily north, never once glimpsing the other canoe, but guided unerringly by the flushing birds.

The overhead whining dropped lower and lower as evening came on. Heralding, club-like blasts swept over the marsh. Sleet

showers, raw and savage, *splashed* across the water, and flailed the dry reeds.

An hour after dark the waterfowl, as if by some signal, broke into a wild commotion that outdid all their previous babel. From the lordly swan to the little jack-snipe it seemed that every feathered thing of the marsh was suddenly piping, gabbling, quacking, trumpeting, booming in a rackety uproar.

By pairs, and V's, and colonies of thousands they began rising out of the muskeg, to circle higher and higher in swift spiraling, and finally to disappear into the clouds.

In a little while more they failed Scott; he could no longer rely upon them to guide him. But that mattered little now, for the twilight was thickening, and gloomy night was beginning to settle down, and his canoe was a blurred and indistinguishable mottle of shadow at five hundred yards.

He cut across a creek, dropped in behind Le Busard, and trailed him by sight, following boldly in the long V-wake of the other craft.

He knew what an anguish of doubt Beatrice must be enduring up there ahead of him in the darkness. Whatever her purpose was in leading him to the rendezvous, she was banking upon him not only to fulfill that purpose, but to save her.

A wise little bush-loper like her surely must have realized all along what a super-human task it was for a man to follow the slight signs she had left. She could not possibly know he was only a few dozen strokes behind. He ached to communicate with her, but there was no way.

While the chase led north through a four-mile channel, across a wind-tossed lake, and into another waterway, he gradually closed up till he was less than fifty yards in the rear. At the distance the other canoe was barely visible through the murky owl-dusk, and he knew that his own craft was a part of the night itself.

He thought out a plan of action. The goal had to be very near; a night camp on those quivering bogs was an utter impossibility, and no person, besides, could be abroad that coming night without heavy fur clothing and shelter.

The very first instant he caught sight of that goal he would glide up silently, overpower or kill Le Busard, and so have one less enemy to deal with.

To attack four men in their own stronghold, whatever it turned out to be, to

meet the savage menace of hungry, wolfish dogs, and grope around in a place where unknown dangers were waiting for him, and get the drop on the bandits; to capture single-handed and tie up four such bloody-handed and desperate men as they were—that was dubious enough a prospect without having their leader's devilish cunning and quick wit and deadly gunwork to overcome also.

To locate the rendezvous beforehand he kept peering into the darkness on ahead of the lead canoe, watching for lights, or some sign of human habitation. Once he thought he saw the flicker of a light far away to the north, and he strained his eyes till he knew it had been a delusion.

But then, when he looked again for the canoe ahead, it had suddenly vanished!

For a moment the blow stunned him. He could not think. His arms were paralyzed. But he shook off the rigor, and choked back a cry of rage, and drove ahead at the spot where he had last seen that moving blur. A creek led off to the right.

Le Busard had taken that; it explained his sudden disappearance. Scott darted into it, the canoe leaping under his strokes. His enemy could be only a hundred yards away.

And then, staring ahead into the blackness for a sight of the other craft, he came suddenly to a place where the creek forked—forked in four directions.

XIV

THE next few minutes were confused despair to Scott, and he hardly realized what was happening save that the canoe he had been following was swallowed up in the blizzard night, taking Beatrice to the rendezvous he would never find.

Dimly he was aware of hurtling his own craft up one of the creeks; of whipping back to the forks and up another and another; of his leaping to his feet and shouting hoarsely, hoping that she might hear and realize what had happened and guide him to her with an answering cry; of the savage wind flinging his voice down the gale; of his sinking down in the canoe, cursing himself for not killing Le Busard and saving Beatrice while that lay in his power.

How long he crouched there he never knew. It was a wolfish howl, somewhere far away in the northwest, that made him raise his head. Another and another howl,

hardly distinguishable from the screaming of the blizzard.

What was a wolf pack doing there in the heart of the huge swamp? They never penetrated it—they could not comb through it till the waterways were frozen over, and snow buried the treacherous muskeg. He listened again, doubting his own senses; and again he heard the long crescendo howling.

This time he caught the direction more exactly, and took it on his luminous compass.

Into the teeth of the blizzard, up one of the creek forks, through a last dark channel, out upon a lake that was whipped to a seething, foaming fury, he drove the black canoe till he saw across at the far lake edge, a great yellow eye gleaming through the night, and a door open in some human habitation, and close again.

He knew that the howling had been the howling of wolfish dogs at Le Busard's homecoming, and that he had reached at last the rendezvous of the fur pirates.

For a little while the reaction from the blackest half hour of his life unnerved Scott; he lay in the bottom of his canoe, and let the blizzard toss him as it would.

The blasts flung spindrift clear over his craft, and sheathed it in ice, and battered it with smashing waves till it quivered like a thing fear stricken. But it took the mauling stanchly, and bobbed and spun as lightly as a cork.

It was a patient labor of love, that black canoe; made by old Manatobee, wizened old sagamore of the Otter Yellow-Knives, and presented as a token of esteem to the yellow-striped "horseman without a horse."

Into its making had gone the canoe wisdom of long generations, the wisdom of a water-roaming people whose boats could live through the ferocious squalls on Great Slave Lake, and yet were so fragile they could be carried one handed over the tote-path.

The strange color of it was not an affection on Scott's part, but a positive help to him. At night on the dark rivers of the Strong-Woods he had many a time stalked and caught his man unseen, as he had followed Le Busard that evening.

But of greater import still, the black canoe was a tangible thing that the criminal mind could lay hold of; a symbol of the stern justice that came unseen in the

night and struck heavy handed. It was inseparably connected with Sergeant Scott and all his uncanny abilities at man hunting.

Among the *métis* and red men his real name was seldom spoken; he himself was called *Le Canot Noir*.

He was exultant as he lay there in the canoe, planning, glancing up now and then to make sure the great yellow eye was still in sight; exultant, and a little too flushed with his success at following Le Busard to the hiding place of the bandits.

He decided, indeed, to go about the rest of the job with caution and deliberate thoroughness—a good resolution if only he had kept it; but his spirit was one of confidence instead of keen awareness of the dangers he was running into.

It seemed to him a thing impossible that he, Sergeant Scott, was lying there a few hundred yards from the rendezvous that he had searched two whole years to find, that a girl's strategy and desperate gamble had won where all his man-hunting wizardry had failed.

He admitted to himself, giving Beatrice only her due credit, that by no other trick or plan under heaven could that hiding place ever have been discovered.

He resolved, as he lay thinking, that there must be no hasty blunder, no single mis-step, and no reluctant trigger-finger in dealing with Le Busard and his outfit. They slept on their guns; they faced the noose if taken alive.

He foresaw gunplay before he got them. They were the five most vicious and crafty outlaws he had ever gone after. His very reputation would not disarm them, as it did the usual criminal.

Defeat this time would mean more than a slip of justice. It meant his own quick death, and Beatrice left in the power of their leader.

Wondering what kind of hiding place the bandits could have in that swamp, Scott battled on across the lake, fighting every inch of the way against the blizzard that tried to hurl him back.

It was like butting into a wall of blackness. His canoe suddenly touched something; touched with a sharp jolt, and swung sidewise. He reached out his hand, and discovered that the shore was a flat rock standing a couple of feet above the swamp level.

He paddled to his right, exploring. The

mystery of how the bandits could live in the heart of a muskeg where a muskrat could hardly find a home, was plain enough.

The granite bed rock underlying the whole Barren Grounds cropped up there to form a little platte a few hundred yards across, a tiny, chance oasis of rock in a desert of water and soup-thin muskeg. One could pass within a short rifle shot of the platte and never see it.

Landing on the north side, and lifting the canoe ashore, Scott crouched there in the darkness, waiting, listening. There was a purpose in his landing on that windward side.

Presently he heard a blood curdling, wolfish snarl twenty steps inland; then another, then half a dozen. Dimly he saw a semicircle of gaunt big forms creeping upon him, almost within springing distance.

The wolfish howling of half an hour ago had forewarned him. He knew they were dogs with so much of the wolf in them that they never barked; dogs that would tear him to pieces. But he had handled savage huskies before.

As he tossed them the *robibbo* from the bag, their snarls at him changed to snarls at one another. Throwing the food closer and closer, he gradually drew them up toward him. By the time he got to the bottom of the bag, he was pounding their huge leader on the flank, and twisting their pointed ears!

"Le Busard was right in that message of his!" Scott laughed grimly. "His huskies *are* hungry. If he'd fed them a little better they might not have accepted my peace offering."

Inland twenty paces the low squat outlines of a building rose up before him. Cautiously he circled and examined it. It was round and domed, like an Eskimo *igloo*. The massive walls were of turf and granite stone. There were no windows.

On the north side was a door, heavily barred against the huskies, and in front of that stood a fur-press. He concluded that the building was their fur magazine, the cache where they stored their stolen peltry.

Unwilling to have any unknown element behind him, he lifted the heavy crossbars from their notches, opened the door, closed it behind him, and lit a double match.

The sight that met his eyes when the matches flared up took his breath away. All along he had known, to his own bitter

chagrin, that the bandits were making a rich haul, but even so he was not prepared for what he saw.

The cache was only twenty-five feet across, with three aisles down through the piled-up peltry; but it was stacked with every bale it would hold. They were not bales of the ordinary run of furs; the bandits had thrown away the cheap, or heavy, or common peltry, and kept only the light, precious skins.

He counted twenty odd bundles of marten pelts, silky-brown spruce martens, each pelt worth a little more than its own weight in gold.

He saw not one bale nor one stack of bundles, but a *whole row* of baled skins of the big Keewatin otter. In the flare of his match the rich, black fur gleamed with an oily iridescence.

There were fisher and mink and Arctic ermine, and half a dozen musk-ox robes of the dark Melville animal. There was a row of white-fox peltry, and another of patch or cross fox.

There were three corded bales of beautiful prime silvers, worth several times their weight in gold, and two bundles of ordinarily good black fox.

On a stone platform at the far end of the magazine lay a bundle of something wrapped carefully in a huge white wolf skin. He pried open a corner of it, and found it contained the cream and the pick of the whole cache, an even score of marvelous black fox pelts, the most exquisite and priceless furs he had ever seen brought together.

He guessed, even before he looked, that all trace of ownership on the various pelts had been done away with. A small part of them, perhaps, could be identified by their owners, in those instances when the owners had not been murdered; but the big majority of them—it struck him suddenly that they would be treated according to the law of property *in derelictum*.

He himself, being an officer of the law, could claim nothing; but if he proved that the property had been recovered through Beatrice's "strenuous and hazardous endeavor, without fee or obligation to do so," one-fourth of it would go to the crown, and three-fourths would be hers! It was a fortune, it was several fortunes, for her.

In spite of all that stunning wealth of furs, he spent hardly two minutes in the cache before backing out and barring the

door again. Holding himself sternly as yet to his plan of knowing the whole lay of the land, knowing just where and how to strike, he crept on inland.

Another building, identical with the fur magazine, loomed up in front of him. A couple birch toboggans and several ivory-shod *komatiks*—long, pliant sleds—stood against the wall outside. From within came the acrid smell of fresh meat.

It was their storehouse, he concluded, and for their winter meat supply the bandits had taken toll of the caribou *foule* he had met down at the edge of the Strong-Woods.

He stood there a moment, flattened against the building, and peering into the blackness around him. The yellow eye he had seen from across the lake was the window of a building fifty yards to his left. About that same distance to his right was another gleam.

Leaning against the blizzard he crept up to this second building, and very cautiously rose at the window. Holding his head back so that he could not easily be seen from within, he gazed down inside—at Le Busard and Beatrice.

XV

THE hut was a single small room, scarcely fifteen feet across, but snug and comfortable, and fitted up with a barbaric luxury of furs.

The floor was carpeted with pelts of the big white wolf from Dease Straits. The walls themselves were covered with lynx and beaver and carcajou skins to keep out the cold when the thermometer stood at sixty below and the "powder days" were roaring.

The bunk against the wall had a magnificent, golden-white rug of a water bear for a mattress, and a coverlet of wolf skins stitched together.

A glance or two took in the rest of the hut, several rifles, a display of ivory-hafted Eskimo knives, some leather bottles on a shelf, and chairs of woven, red-willow withes.

By sheer chance Scott's eyes were drawn to a small object lying on the shelf beside the leather bottles. He looked at it twice before he made out what it was. A small automatic revolver, ivory mounted and ornamented with gold!

So very small a gun, so plainly a woman's weapon, that Scott guessed it was the

gun which Beatrice had carried hidden beneath her *ceinture fléchée*.

Le Busard had discovered she was armed, and had taken the weapon from her!

She was standing tensed in the middle of the hut, half turned away from Le Busard, not daring to meet his sinister eyes.

Her hair, dampened by the lashing spin-drift of the last hour's travel, was a glistening, wavy sheen in the candlelight. Her face was pale, and Scott could see the tremble on her lips.

Again and again her frightened glance went toward the door, and once she set his heart pounding by glancing up at the window.

He knew that she was waiting—waiting in an agony of suspense and doubt; praying that the door would fling suddenly open and the man in whom she trusted—trusted her life and more than her life—would burst in.

Outside in the blizzard night, scarcely ten feet from her, Scott could see the despair that crept into her eyes and deepened on her face each time she glanced in vain hope at the door.

The bandit stood in front of her in the middle of the floor, leaning toward her, talking. His face was flushed, as if he had been drinking heavily since reaching the rendezvous.

His stupefaction at his first sight of her in the cabin down in the Strong-Woods was gone now. It had changed to a brute, possessive air that made Scott's fingers tighten over the butt of his belt-gun.

He pressed his ear against the wall of the cabin to hear what was being said, but the howling of the blizzard drowned out every other sound.

Whatever Le Busard was telling her, he was deriving a gloating satisfaction from it. Scott guessed it had something to do with the mystery which stood between the two of them.

But there was more than gloating satisfaction and triumph on Le Busard's brutal face; there was an ugly, anticipating look.

In the last two years Scott had come to hate the bandit leader with a personal hate for his cold-blooded murders and his baffling, evil cunning; but now, at the look on the man's face, he wanted to fling his gun away and kill him barehanded.

He debated whether he should then and there answer the prayer on her lips. With-

out moving from his tracks he could blow Le Busard's brains out. Or he could crash through the door and batter him senseless.

It was a sore temptation. He wanted to see Le Busard's gloating, lustful expression change to fear and terror at his Nemesis bursting in upon him. The anguish and doubt and despair on Beatrice's features tore at Scott. She believed he had failed her; believed she was alone and helpless.

But caution checked Scott still. The other lighted hut, where the other four bandits undoubtedly were, lay directly down wind, a very short arrow flight away. A shot or a loud noise would be fatal. The bandits would hear it and be warned.

They would surround Le Busard's hut, stand off unseen in the darkness, and shoot through the door and window. He and Beatrice might escape by quick work; but escape out on the muskeg that night would only be trading one kind of death for another.

Her safety, not the capture of the bandits nor his own life, was his chief, harassing thought. Did he dare leave her alone there, weaponless, with that half drunken beast, even for a few short minutes?

It was Beatrice herself who decided the question for him.

XVI

TURNING away from her, Le Busard swaggered over to the shelf and reached down a leather bottle. Scott suddenly pressed his face against the pane, and moved his hand rapidly across it.

The gesture caught her attention. She glanced up. For a moment or two they looked into each other's eyes.

In her passionate leap of soul, in her wordless gratitude that flashed out to him, Scott found his reward for all the black hours that had been his in the last two days; and a thought which had come to him once or twice—the thought that she was merely using him for her purpose—was dispelled by the look she gave him.

He saw, or thought he saw, more than gratitude, more than a woman's reliance and trust in him. He thought it was a woman's love that stood in her eyes.

He gestured toward Le Busard. She understood; for her lips fashioned the word "wait," and she pointed toward the other hut. She meant for him to go there first and attack the bandits, but her eyes begged

him in the name of Heaven's mercy to hurry.

The next moment, when Le Busard turned toward her, she was looking down at the floor. The faint flush that touched her cheeks was not enough to betray her. Her calmness after that fatal moment was the most remarkable show of will power Scott had ever witnessed.

Goaded by the vision of her staving off Le Busard, he leaped across the platte to the other lighted window. The hut was like the one he had just left, though twice as large.

In the center of the room stood a table with a leather bottle, some babiche thongs, and a pack of cards upon it, and around the table stood four men.

One of them was a nondescript white. The other three were *métis*, tricked out with gaudy ribbons and tassels like the fur traders of past generations.

One of the *métis*, Raoul Lacroix, a huge hulking Cree 'breed with a body like a wedge, and muscled like a grizzly bear, belonged to Scott's mental rogue's gallery. He had arrested the man once five years before for playing carcajou to another man's trap line.

Some issue was at stake between the four men. They were drinking a round just as Scott looked in upon them; but when the bottle was set back on the table, they cut the cards. Whatever the issue was, the white man lost, for his oath was visible on his mouth.

He dragged out his belt-gun, twirled the cylinder to make sure it was loaded, and stumped across to the shadows at the far end of the hut.

For the first time Scott saw there was a fifth person in the room; a man sitting with bowed head in the shadows. The discovery startled him, and he watched a second longer, fighting back his desperate haste.

The white bandit grasped the fifth man by the arm, pulled him roughly to his feet, and jerked a thumb toward the door.

As the pair came out into the full candlelight, Scott saw that the lone man's wrists were bound behind him, and that he staggered from weakness. A prisoner of the bandits! Inhuman treatment and days of imprisonment—he could hardly walk!

They were going to kill him. The lots they had just cut, their grinning, evil faces, their utterly calloused indifference—

And then Scott's glance went up to the lone man's pale, drawn face. At the sight of that square jaw, those blunt, rugged features, that mat of curly brown hair, Scott staggered like a hit buck; and a hoarse cry, drowned in the blizzard's uproar, burst from his lips.

"Jim Haydon! Lord God, it's young Haydon they've got. It's Jimmy!"

XVII

His mind flashed back seven years, and out across two thousand miles of wilderness to the Cassiars in British Columbia; to the day when Jim stumbled into his patrol camp bleeding and nearly frozen and wounded from a lone-handed battle with a pack of Tunahlin half-breeds who had been stealing foxes from the Haydon range.

And in a flash that was quicker than thought he remembered vividly how he had nursed the young stranger back to strength, how they had gone after the bush sneaks together, and hung to their trail for three weeks when the temperature stood at fifty below, and snow was piled to the first limbs of the spruces; and how they had met and killed the five men with belt-guns and rifle butts one midnight on the nose of a high glacier, with the Aurora lighting up the grim work; and how a slug had got him in the chest, and young Haydon, wounded himself, had made a toboggan and dragged him sixty miles back to the patrol camp.

With his brain working at dream speed, he suddenly realized then what Le Busard had meant by the whisper that would come out of the Great Marsh. The bandit knew of that partnership between them, stronger than ties of blood. He had meant that when Scott heard of young Haydon being held captive, the sergeant would unlock the cell of the butter-tub and release him as a trade to save his partner's life!

And with his brain afire, Scott understood two other things in that split second he stood watching the tragic face of his partner, that vague, haunting feeling that Beatrice's features were somehow familiar to him—good Heavens, no wonder he had utterly failed to connect her delicate and fragile beauty with the rough, rocky features of Jim Haydon!

Jim had mentioned a sister and a father living, a mother dead; but beyond that he had been strangely silent about his family.

Her name, her identity clear to him now,

Scott leaped to the reason for all she had done. She had known or guessed her brother was a prisoner of the outlaw band, and knew that she herself was powerless to save him.

Therefore her cry of joy and devout thanksgiving when she saw the black canoe of his old partner on the river; and her tremble when she learned who his prisoner was; and all her intimate knowledge about Scott himself!

Playing a desperate game, she had tricked Le Busard, tricked him with a promise of her own person if he would spare her brother's life! There in the cabin she had told him that.

Keeping Scott himself all in the dark, she had given herself into the bandit's power and escaped with him, escaped so that Scott could follow her signs to the hiding place and save Jim.

Le Busard had been coming down that river to capture her and bring her back, when he himself was captured. There in her cabin he had nodded to her desperate proposal—to save himself.

And now when he had her safely at his hut in the Great Marsh, he was laughing scornfully at his promise, and had given orders at his first coming to have Jim Haydon murdered!

The whole bewildering and senseless puzzle—from her first cry at the sight of his canoe to her plea a moment ago that he should attack the bandits without wasting a second to save her—the whole puzzle was clear and rational to him now, save why she had kept him in the dark, and why her brother had been taken prisoner, and what deep, passionate thing stood between her and Le Busard.

Scott brushed the questions aside. For once his fury got the upper hand, and made him forget caution, and betray himself. And his mind flung back, besides, to Beatrice in the hut a bowshot away.

Instead of waiting till Haydon and his intended murderer came outside, then braining the outlaw with a silent blow, arming Jim, and the two of them attacking the three men—instead of that, he leaped around to the door, threw it suddenly open, and jumped inside, belt-gun drawn.

XVIII

THEY stood like men petrified, speechless and stunned, staring at the yellow-striped sergeant whom the blizzard had

flung into their hut. It was the hulking big *métis* Lacroix who first found his tongue, and then the words were jerked from him by his amazement.

"*Le Canot Noir! Nom de nom, it is he, Le Canot Noir!*"

"*Élève!*" Scott ordered sharply. "The trick's mine. You there with the gun—drop it. Damn you, drop it!"

The weapon fell to the floor. Four pairs of hands went up. Scott did not so much as glance at young Haydon; he did not dare.

But out of the tail of his eye he saw his partner stagger a step toward him, and heard the throaty, unbelieving cry of a man dragged back from death by a miracle.

"Yes, it's me, partner." Scott steadied him. "Your eyes aren't lying. But I didn't get here any too soon!"

The muzzle of his gun swerved slightly, and pointed at the white bandit.

"You're wearing a frog-sticker. Step up and cut Haydon loose. Don't get behind him. Stay in the clear—where I can kill you if you make a wrong move. Reach out arm's length when you use that blade."

The man stepped up to Haydon, drew his knife, and cut the babiche thongs.

"Now, then, line up! Couple paces apart. Keep 'em high! And keep looking straight at me!"

They lined up as he ordered, the white man still on the right, then big Lacroix, then the other two 'breeds.

Watching them across the table, Scott could fairly see the four bandits thinking. They had recovered from their daze; they were itching for a split-wink grab at their guns. Three steps behind them half a dozen rifles leaned against the wall.

If they jumped at the same instant they could get their guns and cut him down before he could kill the four of them. But forced to look him straight in the eye, they had no chance to give each other a signal for concerted action.

They each knew that the first man to make a move would be sure to die, and none of them wanted to be that man. They were waiting for a break in their favor.

Scott knew that the trick was not his, not till he had them hog-tied and piled on the floor, and Jim Haydon was guarding them with a rifle. He was conscious of the door standing open behind him, throwing its great rectangular glare out into the night.

Le Busard might see it. If he did, he would surely investigate, for a door standing open to that blizzard meant something was wrong.

But Scott dared not move to close it. At the least quaver of his gun the four men would jump for their rifles. He thought, besides, that in a couple of moments more he would be running back across the platte to save Beatrice, and to settle with Le Busard for good and all.

"Jim," he directed coolly, "get that babiche. Buck up, partner, and help me. You there on the left, bring your hands down easy and hold 'em behind you."

Young Haydon bent and picked up the thongs, walked unsteadily toward the end man, and tied him up.

"Now you!" Scott ordered the next *métis*. "Tie him tight, Jim. For the Lord's sake, hurry, partner!"

Haydon bound the second 'breed. Lacroix and the white man remained.

In spite of his grogginess of body and brain, Haydon had kept behind the bandits in order that Scott could watch them.

The babiche which had been taken off his feet a few minutes ago so that he could walk out to his death was lying on the table. He had to lean forward to get it. In his weakness he overbalanced himself, staggered, and lurched almost against the big *métis*.

With lynxlike quickness for all his bulk, Lacroix ducked down, seized Haydon, and held him as a shield in front of his body.

In that same instant, while Scott was trying to get in a shot without killing his partner, the white man bent and grabbed the gun he had dropped. Scott shot at him, shot to kill him; but the bullet struck the man's elbow, shattering it, knocking the gun out of his hand.

The big breed was backing toward a rifle, sheltering himself with Haydon's body. The white man, cursing and writhing in pain, was fumbling on the floor with his left hand, trying to find the gun.

Scott flung himself forward, and literally tore Haydon from the *métis*'s grasp. He had time for one clean shot. Lacroix grunted as the bullet plowed through him.

But his arm shot out and seized Scott's gun hand, and wrenched it so savagely that the weapon dropped. Haydon flung aside, he drew Scott to him, hugging him like a furied bear, yelling for the white man to get the gun and jump in.

With a feint and a dexterous hip thrust Scott toppled Lacroix. They crashed over backward to the floor, locked in a brutal struggle.

It was a death fight, barehanded, between two powerful men, a fight that was too savage and furious to last long.

As they crashed to the floor, grappling like a panther and a bear, the big *métis*'s fingers clutched Scott's throat. Scott tried to tear them loose, but they clung and tightened into a stranglehold.

In his frenzed efforts to break that grip, he twisted and heaved till he was on top. But the death grip still clung.

The two *métis* whose hands Haydon had bound jumped in. They kicked Scott savagely, kicked him in the head, tried to break him loose. He could not shield himself from that murderous punishment. He had to take it.

With short, smashing blows he hammered at the 'breed's face, trying to batter him unconscious. His lungs were bursting, and a paralyzing numbness was spreading over his body. He beat at Lacroix's blood-smeared face; hammered him with the maddened frenzy of a doomed man. But the death grip clung.

With all the remaining strength of his body he clutched his enemy by the hair, jerked his head from the floor, and banged it down.

Though all his senses reeled, he knew that the blow had told heavily. The death grip suddenly tightened into a grip of steel, as if to kill him before he could repeat that blow.

Again and again, while he fought to keep himself from sinking into the dark, he banged his enemy's head against the floor, till the death grip weakened and suddenly broke, and the big 'breed went limp beneath him.

He staggered to his feet, shook himself together, and looked around. The other two *métis*, expecting quick death, shrank against the wall.

The white man had found the gun, but Haydon had gone after him before he could use it, and was clinging with all his pitifully shattered strength to the man's left arm. The bandit was kicking and mauling him, struggling to shake free.

Scott jumped in. He struck but once, a long-swinging, murderous blow that caught the man on the jaw, lifted him bodily, and sprawled him on the floor.

Grabbing a babcie thong, he stooped, rolled him over, and bound him hand and foot. With Lacroix's own sash belt he hog-tied the big *métis*.

As he straightened up from this to recover his gun and leap across to the other hut, he heard a cry from Haydon, and the ear-jarring snick of a trigger being cocked.

He whirled and saw Le Busard standing in the open door, covering him with a rifle.

XIX

His enemy's eyes went to the bandits lying bound on the floor, and to the other pair cowering against the wall. Then they came back to Scott. For a couple of moments Le Busard said nothing. An ugly grin spread slowly over his face. He enjoyed his triumph silently for a moment.

"I said my dogs were hungry, Yellow-Stripes," he growled finally. "Before they are fed I want to know how you found out our rendezvous—so that we can guard against your successor finding out likewise."

Scott glanced at his gun. It was eight feet away, the nearest rifle still farther.

He felt rather than saw that Haydon was inching toward the revolver lying on the floor.

"I asked a question!" Le Busard repeated.

"I followed your canoe tracks," Scott answered, sparring to give Haydon a few seconds.

Le Busard laughed. "Canoe tracks? Not even you can follow canoe tracks. Do you think I'm a fool? I asked a question. I want an answer."

"I told you the truth," Scott said doggedly. He gestured with his hands as he talked, to keep his enemy's eyes upon him. "I guessed you were staying clear of the tote-paths and swinging around them—like this—in the bush. So I looked back in the bush for your signs."

"You're lying. I left no signs."

He knew that his partner must be almost near enough to stoop and grab up the revolver.

"But I got here," he insisted. "I've tracked men over moss before."

"You're lying. There were no portages, even, for the last four hours."

"I followed by sight," Scott started to explain. "When you were leaving that star-shaped lake at the edge of the swamp, I was standing on top of that mud hill

watching. Do you remember that big flock of white wavies?"

He was interrupted by a growl from one of the *métis* leaning against the wall, a growl of warning to Le Busard.

"Watch that other man! He's going to grab—"

Le Busard swerved his rifle toward Haydon.

"I was wrong, you puppy," he snarled, "in ordering my men to kill you. It's my own privilege. You've hounded me for six years, you and your *p'tite* sister.

"You thought you trailed us here, puppy! We lured you in—to get rid of you. Your *p'tite* sister, I'll keep her awhile; but you—"

Scott groaned. It seemed their last hope on earth had been snuffed out by that growl of warning. Even in that moment his anguish was not for himself nor his partner, but for Haydon's sister.

He turned his eyes away from Le Busard, and looked at his partner. He wanted to say a word of farewell—before he tensed and made that hopeless leap for his belt-gun.

But a strange expression stood on Haydon's face. Not fear or despair, but a look like that which he had seen in Beatrice's eyes when she glanced up at the window and saw him there. Haydon was staring at the door, staring not at the bandit leader, but on past, and out into the blizzard night.

And before Scott had even time to wonder what his partner was looking at, a gun barked outside. Le Busard lurched against the doorway, his rifle started slipping from his hands. He jerked erect again, whirled around toward the enemy outside, and whipped up his rifle.

But Haydon was too quick for him. Stooping, seizing the gun at his feet, he poured five bullets into Le Busard; and as the latter fell and thrashed about on the threshold, Haydon staggered up and put the sixth bullet cleanly through his heart.

Still dazed by the nearness of the call, Scott went toward the doorway. He was bewildered; he did not understand the sudden shot that came out of the blizzard night outside.

But then, in the shaft of light streaming out of the door, he saw Beatrice standing in the swirling snow, a smoking gun in her hand.

She broke down utterly in her brother's

arms, and her slender body shook with sobs. Scott knew they had to get her away from there where she could not see the grotesque huddled thing lying half inside the door.

It was a marvel to him that after all she had gone through, after all her superb courage and her anguished doubt, she should break down and sob now.

It struck him a queer, odd blow that she had not even looked at him, but had flung herself into her brother's arms. It seemed to him as though she had forgotten him now that her brother was saved, as though—his old doubt crept back—as though he had been merely useful to her purpose.

She would be grateful—grateful all her life to him, no doubt. She had pledged her friendship if he would help her; but glancing at her in Jim Haydon's arms, he swore savagely at the thought of being merely her friend.

They were whispering to one another; young Haydon trying to calm her. Through all his doubt and keen jealousy it struck Scott what a splendid pair of fighters that brother and sister were.

From the bandit's snarling words he knew they had been together on a man-hunt of years, and he looked forward to hearing the whole fraught story of it.

His Mounted habits recalled him to the business at hand. He tied and double tied the bandits; bandaged the bleeding wound of the white man, and saw that Lacroix was but slightly hurt.

Outside the door he picked up Beatrice's tiny, ivory-mounted gun where it had fallen from her hands. Twenty steps beyond in the blackness he saw a half circle of gleaming eyes that were creeping closer and closer toward the blood odor on the threshold.

They sent a shiver through Scott. He stooped and lifted Le Busard's body into the safety of the hut.

"Get a rifle, Jim," he bade. "You maybe aren't able to take her across to the other hut; so I will. These men can't stir hand or foot, but we'll make doubly sure. I'll come back shortly and relieve you."

She came to him, and he wrapped his jacket about her shoulders. Half carrying her, he went out the door, and carefully drew it shut behind him to keep out those hungry gleams, and fought his way through the blind, swirling, savage night toward the hut which had been Le Busard's.

The platte already was covered with three inches of snow that seethed and crawled. The blizzard at last had loosed all its pent-up fury. Its clubbing blasts beat at them and nearly swept them off their feet.

It lapped them, engulfed them in blankets of swirling, smothering spindrift. It stung them with icy shot that rode level on the furious gale.

It strung its whipping, mile-long banners of snow over the granite platte, and beat at them from above with wings of darkness, and howled around them like legion hungry-throated wolves yelping down from the Arctic.

Before they had gone a dozen yards, Scott picked her up in his arms, leaning against the blizzard as he walked.

XX

HER frailty and the memory of all she had gone through tugged at him. He did not expect this sudden helplessness, after her courage and fighting soul on the long canoe chase; after her braving the savage dogs to cross the platte; after her shot that saved him and her brother and herself from death. But he understood it and he would have had it that way.

Her head lay in the hollow of his arm and breast, and her arm was about his neck. He wanted to believe that she was his own; that out of all that storm and grim fighting and the appalling desolation of the Great Marsh, he had won the most precious thing of life.

But he dared not think of her so. He wanted to believe it but natural that she had flung herself into her brother's arms after their separation, after her anguished days of knowing he was a prisoner. But the old doubt lingered.

They passed between the storehouse and the magazine where all the wealth of peltry lay cached. He was aware that on both sides of them a few yards away a dozen long, gaunt, wolfish shadows moved with them, keeping their distance, accompanying them like a bodyguard of specters; and Scott shuddered at the terrible peril she had been in when she crossed the platte.

He carried her inside the hut and laid her on the golden-white rug of the bunk, and found a blanket for her. Then he drew up a chair, and waited till her sobs quieted, and she was brushing furtively at her tears with a strand of her hair.

"Beatrice."

She looked up at him, trying to smile cheerfully again.

"If you want to, Beatrice, I'd like—I'd like for you to tell me. I've waited patiently—"

An anguish flitted across her face for a moment, but she fought it down.

"Yes, I promised, and you fulfilled your trust, and I'll tell you everything. Only—"

She turned her face away from him for a little while. He waited, knowing she was gathering strength and courage for her story. He drew his chair closer, when she looked at him again.

At times as she spoke her voice broke, and he had to soothe her back to calmness before she could take up her narrative once more.

It was a story of passion, and brute force and vengeance, and a six-year man hunt; a story that surpassed any he had ever heard, though he himself had hunted men from the Landing to the Circle, and had been witness to brutish deeds and raw, elemental passions through the length and breadth of the north wilderness.

It was a story of two men and a girl twenty-four years ago on the Charlotte Islands off the British Columbia coast; of John Haydon, sturdy young timberman, and of Le Busard, whose hot blood traced back to Cossack *promyshleniki*, and exiled convicts of the old Russian-American days.

The story told of the girl's love for Haydon, of Le Busard's fierce passion and jealousy, and of her dread fear of him; of her marrying John Haydon; of her fear making them leave their island; of their working north and east to the Cassiars, and building a wilderness home, and starting a fur ranch and rearing their boy and girl.

Then Beatrice went on to tell how Le Busard, discovering John Haydon and his wife ten long years after, let his passion and brute jealousy flare out, and hid in the Tunahlin range till he saw a chance to seize John Haydon's wife and take her back to his hiding place; and how she met her tragic death by her own hand.

Of her husband, Beatrice's father, the girl told, hunting the murderer year after year, and dying of grief and baffled vengeance; of her son, Beatrice's brother, taking up the pursuit, sending his sister to relatives three thousand miles down the coast, selling the ranch, turning his last possession into cash for the man hunt.

Then the story went on, of his trailing Le Busard from post to post through the Northwest Territories—Mackenzie, Kee-watin, and Franklin—never quite losing him, never quite locating him till he read the Mounted report, and knew the bandit leader was his blood enemy.

Beatrice had come out that spring to The Pas, and had gone north with him to the wilderness river, where Jim lay in wait all through that summer at the marsh edge, watching the canoe paths, and sighted a bandit canoe one day by sheer luck, and followed it miles into the swampland, on his last trip from which he never returned.

"I was standing in the spruce shadows watching upriver—waiting, though I knew he had been captured," she added. "And when I saw your black canoe, it was like a miracle, Brian. I knew you would help me. And then, while we were walking up the path to our cabin, the whole plan sprang into my head.

"Le Busard told me he had tortured information from my brother, and had been coming down the river to take me when you captured him, Brian.

"When he saw me in the cabin he must have thought the dead had come to life again, for I look so much like my mother that my father's old friends who knew her stare at me as if I am a ghost."

Scott sat in silence, trying to see in its fullness this story running down through a quarter of a century to the grim finale of ten minutes ago.

"But why," he asked at last, "why didn't you and Jim come to me? We would have gone after your enemy together. Jim knew I'd have done that."

"We talked of that many a time, Brian, especially when we were hopeless of ever finding him ourselves. But it was our hunt, not the law's. You could not have helped us kill our enemy. We did not want it so. I thank God," she added passionately, with a fighting sparkle again in her eyes. "I thank God it was Haydon bullets that killed him."

"I can see that, I can understand," Scott said softly. "But down in the cabin, why didn't you tell me everything then? When we stood outside there together, you knew, surely you knew there was nothing in the world I wouldn't have done for you."

"Oh, but there was, Brian! You would not have released your man—never Le Busard! It was against all your training

and your code. You would never have allowed him to escape.

"And because you—because you *were* my friend, you would never have agreed to my dangerous plan. Maybe now when the whole story is written and he is dead, and the bandits are your prisoners, maybe you *think* you would have done it."

In his deepest solemn conscience Scott admitted that she spoke the truth. She had known him better than he knew himself.

XXI

BUT he wanted to sweep aside all that and forget the past. There was something of the present, of that moment, that he wanted to speak about.

But it seemed to him that if he spoke of that now, it would be like asking payment for his helping her, like demanding her because he had done her a great service.

Besides, the old, gnawing doubt which had surged up in him a quarter hour ago still possessed him and sealed his lips.

Her hand had crept out and found his, and he quivered at the slight clasp of her fingers. Her eyes were studying him intently; she seemed puzzled at his silence. She rose to an elbow, and moistened her lips to add something more.

He felt that surely she had guessed why he said nothing, why he had to recoil from anything that seemed like asking payment. Was she going to free him, was she going to open up a chance for him to speak?

And then she was speaking again, not the words he ached to hear, but speaking of her pledge of friendship, and of her life-long gratitude to him.

Scott sat listening dully, never answering, hardly hearing what she said. Friendship—gratitude—when he had to grip himself fiercely to keep from kneeling and clasping her, and telling her passionately that he had won her, and she had to be his!

She must have noticed his struggle, and wondered at it and his silence. Her words became broken, and finally she grew silent, still watching him curiously.

A little while later he rose, and told her he must go back to his prisoners. He wanted to get out of her presence. His steeled control was breaking. Out in the blizzard night he could get a fresh grip upon himself.

When he told her he was leaving, he saw a quiver run through her slender body.

She looked up at him startled, and utterly unbelieving.

He saw that his words and his action had deeply wounded her, and that her eyes were suddenly misty with tears. He did not understand why he had startled her, or why she was looking up at him in such utter disbelief.

Not till she flung out her arms toward him, and he heard her sobbing whisper, "Brian—are you actually going—going away—without—without—"

And then, because he was bending down toward her, Scott read the reproach and the tenderness that stood in her eyes; and like the heavens opening up he did understand at last.

In a moment that left him dazed and trembling he understood why she had ut-

terly disbelieved his words, and why his actions had been a mortal wound, and understood why she was reproaching him for not taking the heart that had all the time been his to take.

And he saw that his doubt of her love had been utterly beyond her belief!

In awe of her beauty and her sweet girlishness he knelt down, trembling, and felt her arms go round his neck, and her lips seek his. And while her wet cheek rested against his own, and his arms stole around her shoulders with his gentle strength, it seemed that all the long years of his life had been but a preparation for that single moment.

"You *will* marry me, darling!" he breathed.

And her "Yes" was another kiss.

THE END

THE PRISONER

CITIES and nations waited me
Free-footed to the horizon's bound:
Yet I was more a prisoner
Than one whom prison walls surround;

For every way I turned I went
Shackled beneath the open sky:
Locked in the prison of myself,
The jailer and the jail was I.

Thinking my days more fortunate
Than theirs, the ways I went, more free,
No one could see the chains I wore
And there were many envied me.

Yes, I was clever, I was wise:
My feet, they trod in caution so—
"I will not give a single mite
Unless Life yield its quid pro quo;

"And shall I let my effort soar,
My passion for achievement burn
Without a thought for what the world
Will give my effort in return?"

Grudging, I met with grudging still,
And, peering for equivalence,
Nothing I gave, and nothing won—
The crafty niggard's recompense.

Then one day I forgot myself
As by an accident divine:
I gave an honest gift of love,
And all the universe was mine.

The stars were silver to my purse;
My soul forswore all duller pelf;
My shackles fell, and I was free
From that mistaken miser, Self!

Harry Kemp

The Ninth Time

DUNK FARROW, OF TICKFALL, WANTS A WIFE, BUT HAS GREAT DIFFICULTY IN FINDING ONE WHO WILL SUPPORT HIM AS A GOOD WIFE SHOULD

By E. K. Means

DUNK FARROW sat in the Hen-scratch soft drink emporium in an attitude of deep meditation. Dunk was trying to think, and he really thought he was thinking. The effort made his black, kinky hair stand on end. It made great drops of perspiration roll down his black, wrinkled face. It drew down the corners of his wide mouth, pouted his thick lips, puckered his blue-black, stupid eyes, and hunched his muscular, lazy body over the cheap pine table that supported his ragged elbows and his dilapidated wool hat.

And yet, with all his labor, he was not thinking, but merely rummaging in the almost vacant corridors of his brain and finding at intervals a few scraps of old, worn-out ideas.

"I hates wuck. I'm done a heap of hard wuck in my day. Ef I don't pick up some loose money somewhar, I'll hab to go to wuck agin. One time I got so pore I had to wuck on Sunday. I needs money. Ef I had money, I wouldn't need to wuck. I could buy me a autermobile an' wouldn't hab to walk. I could set down and travel. I wish I had some new clothes! Dis ole hat is mighty nigh wore out. Ain't never had no coat wid dis here suit. I needs a wife to suppose me, but all de willin' wuck-er wives is already married to de sons of rest. De good Lawd is kinder overlooked my needs!"

This laborious cogitation was interrupted by the entrance of a woman named Gaudy Tandy. She was a buxom black girl, bubbling with health and good nature, easy-smiling, and always humming a religious tune.

"Whut's yourn, Gaudy?" Little Bit inquired from behind the counter.

"Gimme a big cup of black coffee, little

nigger," she told the boy. "I'm so tired I wish I could git married and settle down an' set down an' stay so, an' den I wish somebody would die an' inherit me some property, so I wouldn't hab to wuck no more!"

"No hope," Little Bit grinned, as he placed the cup before her and slid the sugar bowl down the counter.

"I ain't so shore dar ain't no hope," Gaudy retorted. "Dar is plenty onmarrid men in de worl', an' dat gibs me a chance at mattermony; an' pap is ole an' sick, an' ef he dies I'll git de house an' land."

"Is your paw ailin' much?" Little Bit asked.

"Shore is," replied Gaudy. "Dat's how come I'm so tired an' sleepy. I set up all night to gib him his medicine, an' now I come to town to git him another bottle. Dat ole man is awful worrisome when he gits sick!"

"I hope you won't be bothered wid him long," Little Bit said in a tone of deep sympathy. "I hope he'll git well—or somepin."

"Me, too," agreed Gaudy. "I'm git-tin' wore out. Dat ole sick, rambunctious goat of a man, he ain't got no feelin' fer a body. Ef I gits out'n his sight fer a minute, he sets up in bed wid dem little gray goat whiskers shakin' on de end of his chin an' bleats jes' like a ole ram: 'Gaudy! Gaudy!'"

The woman's imitation of a goat was so good that Little Bit broke into a cackle of laughter. Then he said:

"You hadn't oughter talk so unfeelin' about yo' pore sick, dyin' popper."

"Huh! He ain't no kin to me whutsumever," declared Gaudy, as she drank the

last drop of the coffee and began to scrape the sugar from the bottom of her cup with a spoon. "He's jes' my maw's las' cote-house hubbunt. Maw's dead, an' he's all but, an' he got a lawyer to make out papers an' leave me whut he's got, ef I takes keer of him ontill de blessed Lawd comes fer him an' mussifullly cornducks him to de land of eternal blessedness."

"Dat makes it look to me like you mought inherit property," Little Bit said.

"Shore, little nigger boy," Gaudy said confidently. "Dat ole man jes' nacherly cain't live ferever; but he shore does pass a good many mighty good stoppin' places!"

II

DUNK had sat unnoticed by the woman up to this time, and now he slipped unostentatiously out of the rear door. It was a warm, bright day, and this dark-skinned child of the sun should have bathed in the effulgent light and geared his speed to the progress of the solar planet—twenty-four hours to get around to where he was going. Instead of that, Dunk started at a trot, got his second wind two blocks down the street, and widened his gait to a jack rabbit lope. He was in a hurry. His destination was the Shin Bone Restaurant.

He went in and sat down, so winded by his run that the breath whistled in his nostrils as a frightened horse whistles when he smells a bear. Sukie, the somnolent waitress, shuffling along with a tray of food on her arm, her eyes half closed, and her mind in a comatose condition, stumbled over Dunk's feet and spilled a cup of coffee upon the knees of his pants.

Shin Bone, the proprietor of the eating house, witnessed the accident. Hastening forward with a soiled, greasy rag, he mopped off the legs of Dunk's trousers.

"Dat ain't Sukie's fault," he said quickly and apologetically. "Yo' derned ole legs is nine hunderd an' ninety-nine feet long, an' yo' foots spread out all over dis here resteraw. Why don't you set at de table nex' to de wall, an' stick yo' foots out'n de winder todes de sky?"

"I ain't blamin' nobody," Dunk protested mildly, still panting from his run. "Sukie is a good waiter when she ain't asleep. When she fell over me, she wus walkin' in her sleep. Ef I'd 'a' been a oystyer stew, she'd 'a' fell in de soup; but I ain't mad at nobody, an' I ain't got nothin' agin nobody."

Shin Bone straightened up from his effort to mop off his patron, and gazed at him with speechless surprise. Then he sat down in a chair opposite Dunk, and leaned forward, asking with great solicitude:

"How come you ain't mad, Dunk? How come you don't demand damages—at least a cup of coffee inside of you fer whut wus wasted on yo' britches? Whut ails you, Dunk? Ain't you feelin' tol'able?"

Dunk looked at the proprietor with a moony and chuckle-headed expression, and asked meekly:

"Shin Bone, wus you ever in love?"

"Good gosh!" Shin exclaimed.

Rising from his chair, he went over and stood behind the cigar counter, his soiled and greasy rag smelling now of coffee, and he threw it violently upon the floor to express his disgust with everything.

Dunk smiled sadly. He was in such a chastened mood that if a waitress had spilled coffee on one knee, he would have rejoiced that he had another knee to offer. If Shin Bone had smitten him on one cheek, he would have turned the other also; and if Shin had punched his nose, he would have regretted that he had but one nose to give to his adversary. The whole world does not love a lover; the lover loves the world. Still, Dunk was not so hopelessly incompetent as not to take advantage of the situation.

"Since you done advised me on dat, don't I git a cup of coffee on my inside to pay me fer whut wus wasted on my outside?" he inquired in a beseeching tone.

Shin Bone drew the coffee and brought it over to the table himself. When he placed it before Dunk, the negro stirred the sugar in with a spoon.

"Kin I gotch a cullud lady here fer dinner," he asked humbly.

"You owe me fo' bits already," Shin Bone told him.

"Certainly, but dem fo' bits is fer two meals whut I done et," Dunk replied. "Dis here is a new trade."

"Shore!" Shin snapped. "An' I reckin you figger ef I let you eat two meals mo', dat will settle de ole account."

"Naw, suh," Dunk hastened to explain; "but I done got some expectations. Two meals an' two meals is fo' meals, an' I expecks to pay you fer dem all when I gits married to a rich nigger gal. Jes' one meal at de fistidious Shin Bone Resteraw will sottle de case. I figger you could affode to

invest, an' you oughter hab a heart to he'p a nigger whut is tryin' to git a start up in de worl'."

"Who is de fool nigger woman?" Shin Bone demanded, after staring at him for a long time.

"Gaudy Tandy," Dunk told him. "Her paw is gwine inherit her some property when he dies; an' I knows from her own mouth dat he's ailin' consid'able, an' mought haul off an' die mos' any time."

"Dat ole pap of Gaudy's is got as many lives as a cat," Shin said; "but I reckin I could affode to take a chance on two mo' meals, wid de hope dat you gits married an' yo' pap-in-law dies real soon. Fotch de female in."

III

WHEN Gaudy came out of the front door of the drug store, it appeared to her that she had merely chanced to meet Dunk Farrow at the entrance.

"Howdy, Gaudy?" Dunk greeted her. "I'm jes' ramblin' along todes de Shin Bone Resteraw to git me a bait of fried cat. Come along wid me!"

"Honey, I'm always willin' to stop an' talk an' eat," replied Gaudy, with a smile. "In dis case I'm jes' nachelly 'bleeged to go wid you. My innards craves vittles."

"I'm heard tell dat yo' paw is got a misery of some kind," Dunk remarked, as they walked along.

"Ole age ails him," Gaudy answered. "He's mighty nigh de eend of de journey, an' de dorctor tol' him he wus diggin' his grave wid his teeth. He's always been a survig'rous eater. I tries to hol' him down an' cut off his rations; but he says he likes to eat, an' he ruther be dead dan hungry."

"Me, too," Dunk declared, as they sat down in the restaurant; "so you better look over dis bill of fare an' awder two plates of fried cat."

"Dat's whut I craves," agreed Gaudy, looking at the bill of fare and pretending she could read.

"Dar ain't nothin' else listed on dat paper dat's fitten to eat," Dunk replied, also pretending to read. "Catfish fer me!"

When the order was given to the same slovenly waitress who had spilled the coffee on Dunk a short time before, and who now looked as if she had been asleep about three days and was a somnolent perambulator, Dunk lighted a long perique stogy and smiled genially at Gaudy Tandy.

"You know, Gaudy," he said, "you is de kind of nigger woman I likes best. You ain't got no frills, an' you like to grin as much as a 'possum, an' I bet you an' me could hit it off fine together."

"I don't misdoubt dat fack, Dunk," Gaudy agreed heartily. "We bofe like to eat, an' ef you is a good pvider—"

"Does you figger yo' paw is gwine kick de bucket real soon?" Dunk interrupted.

"He sho' is fixin' to die off on me," replied Gaudy, fingering the bottle of medicine that rested on the table beside her. "He's took powerful bad. I'm jes' wastin' time an' money pourin' dis dope down his gullet."

"You'll be lonesome when he leaves you," Dunk said. "You got to hab some man lib in de cabin wid you an' perteck you. You reckin I'd suit fer dat place?"

"I ain't wasted much time studyin' about dat, Dunk, but I jes' nachelly knows you'll suit. I don't always trust my mind—"

"Me, too," Dunk interrupted. "My mind is powerful onreliable; but ef you'll marry me, we won't lose no time. Us will git married fust an' think it over as we goes along together."

"I's knowed you all my life, Dunk," Gaudy said. "Tain't like gittin' married to a pufleckly strange genterman on shawt notice. I takes you right now fer good or bad!"

They arose to leave the restaurant, and Gaudy glanced back to the rear of the room, where a table had been hidden by a screen. She uttered a startled exclamation.

"Paw!" she cried.

"Huh?" replied an old gray negro with a face and beard like a goat.

"Whut in de name of mud is you doin' here?" Gaudy demanded.

"Eatin'," the old man answered simply.

"Whut is you done et up to now?" Gaudy asked in an excited tone.

"I ain't got started good, because I been ailin' fer de las' few days," old Tandy apologized; "but up to now I'm et two pieces of pie, an' three ham sandwiches, an' a quart bottle of milk. On my way down to dis eatin' house I bought a sack of peanuts, an' a popcorn ball, an' a bag of molasses candy suckers, an' some cream cakes, an' a dime's wuth of sugar cookies, an' a few mo' things like dem."

"All dat truck will kill you!" Gaudy

shrieked. "De dorctor told you it wus cold p'ison fer you—"

"Huh! It's powerful slow p'ison," said old Tandy. "I been enjoyin' my eats all my life, an' I'm nigh onto eighty year ole an' ain't never died yit!"

The two passed out, leaving the old man gazing hungrily at his plate and wondering what to order next. As Dunk walked thoughtfully home with Gaudy, he shook his head hopelessly and said:

"Gaudy, dat ole man ain't nowhar nigh dead. He's eatin' too hearty. When a nigger an' a mule gits ready to die, dey gits offen deir feed!"

IV

IN the afternoon Dunk Farrow came back to the Henscratch and sat down in deep and gloomy meditation. His face was seared as with a hot iron by the effort he was making to think a way out of the predicament into which he had precipitated himself.

"Dat ole Tandy ain't fixin' to die. He ain't even turned his mind todes kickin' off. He's foolin' Gaudy so she'll wait on him real good; but he ain't gwine fool me!"

He lighted a cigarette and sucked at it with but slight satisfaction in the smoke. Once more his one-cylinder mind began to pop:

"I shore overspoke myself when I axed dat gal to marry me! I'll hab to lib wid dat ole man an' wait on him ferever. De mo' nussin' he gits, de longer he'll live. Ef two of us gits together an' nusses him, he won't never die. He's lived too long already, wid nobody but Gaudy to keer fer him. Gaudy expecks me to marry her tonight, but I ain't gwine do it. Wonder how kin I git outen dis mess!"

Then the light of hope dawned in Dunk's eyes as the door of the Henscratch opened and the Big Four of Tickfall entered. They arranged themselves noisily about a table, and called to Little Bit to bring them cooling drinks. Dunk waited until they had quieted down a little, and then came over to where they sat.

"Hello, Dunk!" Skeeter Butts greeted him. "I jes' heard tell dat you wus aimin' to git married."

"You don't love nobody but yo'se'f, Dunk," Vinegar Atts remarked. "You's gittin' married fer a home an' a nigger woman to wait on you."

"Dat's a pretty good reason," declared

Figger Bush. "I got married fer dat puppus only, an' I ain't regretted it till yit—leastwise, I ain't regretted it continual. Anyhow, I ain't repented it."

"Dunk don't look like no happy man who's ponderin' on de joys of cormittin' mattermony," Pap Curtain commented. "He looks like he's bothered."

"I is," Dunk said simply.

"Whut ails you?" Skeeter demanded.

"I ain't as anxious to git married as I thought I wus," Dunk confessed. "I'm los' my enthusiasm, an' I'm huntin' a way out."

"Huh, dat's easy!" cried Skeeter. "Tain't no trouble to bust yo' mattermony up, especially befo' dat sad event comes to pass. All you got to do is—"

Skeeter broke off and stared around him, wondering what to say next. Something seemed to be lacking. He needed an efficacious plan, but he could not think what plan to propose.

"Well, you-all go on wid yo' side of it," he concluded lamely, and began to fan himself with his derby hat.

"Dunk ain't de proper pusson to wuck any kind of plan Skeeter kin think up," Vinegar Atts remarked. "He oughter pretend like he's cravin' to go on wid it, an' somebody outside oughter bust up dem arrangements. Little Bit could do it."

"Naw!" Little Bit howled. "I'm jes' a little sody-slingin' nigger, an' cain't be trusted wid no mattermony jobs. I ain't gwine mess wid it!"

"None of dis crowd kin wuck Skeeter's wonderful plan on Gaudy," Pap Curtain asserted, gazing contemptuously at Skeeter, who, still dumbly wondering what plan to suggest, was much embarrassed by their irony. "Ef we try Skeeter's plan, dat gal will smell a mice. Us needs a stranger whut ain't won de international belt fer plain an' fancy lyin'."

"Ain't dar no new coons in town?" Vinegar Atts asked.

"I knows one," Skeeter announced. "He's sellin' a new fancy rat poison. He claims it will kill any rat whut has got good sense. He complains dat his trouble is dat some rats ain't got no sense. Dey walks all aroun' dat rat poison an' won't eat it. Sense is sense."

"Mebbe we could fix up a match betwix' Gaudy an' dis rat man," Pap suggested hopefully. "Den, ef ole Pap Tandy lived too long, dey could butter him a bis-

cuit an' gib him a few sirup wid a little rat p'ison rubbed in."

"Tain't possible," Skeeter remarked. "Dis here rat poison smells like somepin dead, or some kind of fumigate, and at night it shines like de head of a match when you lick it wid yo' tongue, or like dat fox fire in de woods."

"Got phosphorus in it," Pap Curtain explained. "Rats an' roaches craves dat smelly, shiny, pasty stuff."

"Whut's dis here rat poison nigger named?" Figger Bush inquired.

"Calls hisself Velvet Wicks," Skeeter answered.

"I moves dat Dunk hunt up Velvet an' pussuade him to come down to de Hen-scratch," Figger Bush said. "Us'll wait."

Half an hour later Velvet Wicks entered the place alone and came directly to the table where the Big Four sat.

"Nigger sot me here to see you-all," he announced.

"Set down, Velvet," Skeeter said cordially. "We craves a little civil conversation wid you. We needs yo' he'p."

"I needs some he'p myself," Velvet replied. "De rat poison bizness ain't so awful good in dis town. People believes in cats. Dar is mo' black cats in Tickfall dan in any yuther bad-luck place I ever wus in."

"Whut you needs is a wife who kin wuck an' he'p you make a livin'," Vinegar Atts told him.

"I don't know but one female woman in dis town," Velvet declared. "Me an' Gaudy Tandy is knowed each yuther fer a long time, but I ain't saw nothin' of her since I come."

"Her paw's been sick, an' she's been keepin' pretty close in de house, but she lives here all right. Howsomever, you ain't got no chance to marry in dat fambly, because Gaudy's gittin' ready to step off tonight," Pap Curtain said.

"Who is she wedlockin' wid?" Velvet asked.

"Dunk Farrow," Vinegar told him.

"He's a wuthless, good-fer-nothin', no'-count, lazy coon whut hadn't oughter hab a wife," Velvet declared. "Gaudy oughter waited fer me."

"Tain't too late yit," Vinegar suggested. "Gaudy will git some property from her paw when he dies, an' you'll be well fixed ef you git her."

"Whut did you-all want wid me?" Velvet inquired.

"You done touched on de subjeck," Vinegar answered. "We figger dat Gaudy is fixin' to marry de wrong man. She's done made a bad guess."

"Mebbe she kin guess agin," Velvet said smilingly. "Eve'y nigger woman oughter be allowed two guesses. I craves to go out to see Gaudy now. Whar do she live at?"

V

THE sun was just above the western horizon when Velvet seated himself upon the little porch in front of the Tandy family cabin.

"Us ain't saw each yuther fer nigh onto five year, Gaudy," Velvet began; "but I figgered I better hunt you up when we wus in de same town."

"Suttinly! I remember you axed me to marry you in dem far-off days," Gaudy replied.

"Dat's right," Velvet said sadly. "I cain't ax you no mo', because I done heard you is spoke for; but I heard a squinch owl all de way out to yo' place to-night. He follerred me all de way, an' I couldn't shake him off nohow. I figger it wus a warnin' to you dat you done seleck de wrong man fer yo' husbunt, an' dat a death is gwine occur in de fambly in a little while."

"Whut do de good Lawd know about dat?" Gaudy exclaimed, showing the whites of her eyes.

"De Lawd ain't tellin' you nothin', honey," Velvet replied; "but whut I'm sayin' is dat you better not pull off no mattemony wid no coon you is got in yo' mind right now."

"I figger I done missed de man," Gaudy said uneasily. "I took holt of dat Dunk Farrow nigger too quick. I wish I'd waited till you showed up!"

"Yes'm, an' here I is, real handy. Don't dat go to show dat us is fixed up fer each yuther?"

"Shore do!" Gaudy agreed.

Then she rose and looked about her uneasily, for she heard the weird keening of a screech owl, which to all superstitious people is a sign of death.

Velvet stood up, laid the contents of his pockets upon the bench where he had been sitting, and solemnly turned every pocket in his clothes wrong side out. The cries of the screech owl ceased. Velvet put his

things back in his pockets and sat down comfortably.

"Dat shore drives a squinch owl away," he remarked. "Dey cain't holler no mo' when you turns yo' pockets out."

"I seen him fly over dat tree," Gaudy said uneasily, glancing up at the pecan that shaded the house. "He looked kinder white. You reckin dat's some kind of sign?"

"Suttinly! An' now you done saw dat light, you won't marry Dunk Farrow, will you?"

"Velvet, I ain't gwine marry dat nigger nohow. I ain't axin' fer no signs. One is a plumb plenty fer me," Gaudy said earnestly.

"Supposin' you don't take Dunk," Velvet went on, "ef I axed you real earnest to marry me, you reckin' you could guess dat I was de right man?"

"I feels in my bones dat de good Lawd is done sont you to me," Gaudy murmured. "Dunk kin jes' go off an' hunt somebody else. I wants you! Dunk is comin' to see me to-night, an' I wants you to stay wid me when I tells him."

"Gaudy, I'm got a hunch Dunk ain't comin'," Velvet said. "Ef he don't, I'll know dat you b'longs entirely to me."

Darkness settled upon the scene. The mist from the swamp rose in a dense fog and increased the blackness, obscuring the light of the stars. Heat, like a steaming blanket, enveloped the two lovers sitting upon the porch. Every living thing panted for breath and waited for the evening breeze to come in from the Gulf of Mexico.

Down at the far end of the lane that led to the cabin where Gaudy and Velvet were sitting, a mellow, Ethiopian voice was raised in song. A country negro always sings when he travels alone in the dark. The more lonesome he feels the louder he sings, and when he is both lonesome and scared he can be heard for a mile. Dunk Farrow, walking through the thick fog, was howling:

"I eats when I's hongry, I drinks when I's dry; Ef de white folks don't hang me, I'll live till I die!"

Just then he came near to a sudden and violent death from pure fright, and Gaudy Tandy nearly expired from terror in her lover's arms.

A strange whimpering sound was heard in the little yard beside the house, resembling the whine of the screech owl. Then

a streak of shining light appeared along the ground, moving, twisting, writhing. It passed through the gate and out into the lane that led to the big road. There it rose from the ground and floated, making a straight line down the dusty wagon trail along which Dunk Farrow was walking on his way from Tickfall.

The glowing streak of light passed beside Dunk, halting his footsteps, stopping his song, and straightening out his kinky wool so that every hair stood on end. Then it slowly settled at his feet and writhed and twisted like a live thing, moving with a hissing sound where it touched the ground.

"Great Gawdlemighty!" Dunk Farrow shrieked. "Come here quick, everybody!"

But nobody came. Dunk started to run forward toward the Tandy cabin, but the trail of light was before him. He turned to run back, but the same mysterious glow was there. He could not stand where he was, for the luminous streak was close beside him, hissing like a snake; so he side-stepped into a barbed wire fence beside the lane, and followed the strands of wire until he tore off his pantaloons as neatly as if they had been cut from his person with a pair of scissors. When daylight came, parts of his trouserings were found hanging to the fence for a hundred feet along the lane.

Dunk finally found a weak place in the wire and went through, whooping, shrieking, praying, running and plunging away from there, and searching his soul for sounds to tell how terrified he was.

VI

THE next morning Dunk sat in the Hen-scratch, in an attitude of deep meditation. He was trying to think, and he thought he was thinking, but he found the act laborious.

He had lost a large amount of skin in his collision with the fence on the night before, and he was feeling acutely uncomfortable. His shirt was a ragged ruin. His new trousers had been donated by a fat man whose excessive size would have made it possible for Dunk to conceal a dog in the surplus folds of his nether garment. His few and well worn ideas traveled in the same rut:

"I hates wuck. I needs money. Ef I had money, I wouldn't need to wuck. I wish I had some new clothes! I wonder whar my hat is at! When it blowed off las'

night, I didn't hab time to stop an' pick it up."

This laborious cogitation was interrupted by the entrance of Vinegar Atts, all resplendent in his stovepipe preaching hat, his white shirt and collar, and his black Prince Albert suit. His three friends were also arrayed in their showiest garments, and all four were in a good humor.

"It was a grand weddin', Dunk, even ef you wusn't de chosen bridegroom!" Vinegar bellowed to the ragged beggar sitting at the table.

"Huh!" Dunk grunted, and showed no further interest.

"I don't ketch on to one thing," Skeeter Butts said. "Whut is dis here tale dey's tellin' about a streak of light runnin' down de lane?"

Little Bit broke out in a cackling laugh.

"I kin esplain dat," he said. "Velvet Wicks tuck a ball of twine an' rubbed it into dat rat poison. He soaked it good, so dat phosphorus wus on it. Den I borrowed Skeeter's dawg an' toted him out to Gaudy's cabin; an' when Velvet gimme de sign, I tied de eend of dat ball of twine to de eend of dat purp's tail, an' turned him loose."

"Lawd! Lawd!" Pap Curtain murmured.

"Dat dawg went home down dat lane wid a shinin' tail half a mile long," Little Bit concluded, with a laugh. "I played de squinch owl, too."

"Well, anyhow, it come out happy," said Vinegar; "but it's shore queer how close de weddin' an' de funeral will come to each yuther in dat house."

"Who's daid?" Dunk Farrow asked.

"Ole Paw Tandy deceased las' night," Vinegar informed him. "He snuck out of bed yistiddy an' went to de Shin Bone Resteraw. Dere he et such a lot of truck it kilt him."

Dunk Farrow winced as if a knife had pierced him, and shook his head in defeat and despair. Then he thrust his hand into his pocket and brought forth two objects. One was a knife, the other a piece of soft lead which Dunk had worn as a pocket piece until it was as shiny as silver.

He counted eight notches which had been cut in the lead, and then, with great ceremony, he opened the blade of his knife and added one more.

The men watched him silently, until at last Vinegar Atts was impelled by curiosity to inquire: "Whut you doin', Dunk?"

"I's recordin' de fack dat I has failed to comit mattermony agin," Dunk told them. "Dis am de ninth time!"

IN MY GARDEN

I GATHERED the fragrant roses
That grew by my garden wall;
But my heart was sad, and small joy I had
In their beauty, after all.
For every beckoning petal
In my rose world seemed to say:
Life is changed somehow, and we're lonely now,
Since you sent our prince away.

I gathered a wealth of roses,
But their charm was not the same.
For each bowed its head, pink, white or red,
And whispered: You were to blame.
We are missing his voice to praise us,
He was light of our rose world gay;
Now our sun has set, and we can't forget
That you sent our prince away.

I gathered my fragrant roses,
But they dropped from my trembling hands,
I can hold my pride and be brave, outside,
But my garden understands.
And my tears are dew on the rose leaves,
And my heart is sad to-day;
He is gone so long, and I know I was wrong,
When I sent our prince away.

L. Mitchell Thornton

Hoboken, of All Places!

A STORY WHICH THROWS AN INTERESTING LIGHT ON THE
QUESTION WHETHER A SELF-RESPECTING PERSON
CAN LIVE WEST OF THE HUDSON RIVER

By Mella Russell McCallum

DON RENWICK worked for a down town banking house, and twice a year he might have posed for a tailor's advertisement—when he got his spring and fall suits. Just now he was hurrying to the Hudson tube, not because he wanted to go to New Jersey—Heavens, no!—but because he had to eat supper with his aunt in Hoboken. Hoboken, of all places! And *supper!* Don's friends recognized no such meal, except after eleven o'clock in the evening.

It was a hardship to have a relative in Hoboken. Those New Jersey towns were so uninteresting! They weren't even suburbs, but just great sprawling overflows of New York. Hoboken somehow seemed the worst of them all. Such a comical-sounding place! Well enough to sail from it, but imagine any one's living there!

It wouldn't have been so bad if Aunt Sophie had had the grace to be ashamed of it; but she hadn't. She owned a sixteen-flat building, and lived on the top floor; and the only time Don had suggested that her income ought to enable her to live in New York, she had opened her nice blue eyes—eyes like his dead mother's—and demanded:

"What would I want to live in New York for?"

Don, of course, was a passionate New Yorker. He had lived there two years, and he felt very sorry for the rest of the country.

Aunt Sophie hadn't always been a Hobokenite. She had come from the Michigan cooky-jar belt originally, just as Don had; but away back in the mauve decade she had attended some silly exposition or other in Chicago, and had met a German gentleman, who had wooed and won her

and brought her to Hoboken. After a time the German gentleman had died, leaving her to manage the sixteen flats as best she could—which had turned out to be very well indeed.

It was only natural, Don agreed, that she should be delighted when he left college and came East. He had been glad to see her, too, for she was the only near relative he had. He really was very fond of her—she was a grand old scout; but Hoboken! It was a nightmare and a nuisance—especially to-night, when the gang was going to celebrate Sam McCord's landing on a newspaper syndicate, and the round table at Joe's would be merry, and Dulcie Dean—

Don's throat grew savagely tight as he thought of Dulcie Dean. For Dulcie was—well, he didn't know whether she was his girl or not. To-night Sam McCord would dance with her a lot, and—oh, you know how it is when you're not sure of a girl—you've just got to stick around. Sam was one of those literary chaps, while Don was only a bank clerk, and no matter how artistic a bank clerk may feel inside, it certainly sounds prosaic.

He rammed himself down the eastern throat of the tube, and was spilled out presently on the wrong side of the Hudson. Then ten blocks in a trolley car, and around the corner to the respectable cement building, with its two heavy stoops and fat pillars, which contained Aunt Sophie's flats.

Such a common-looking place! Not a bit like the elegant apartment house which deigned to domicile Don, with its foyer of marble and mirrors, and the gilt elevator that lifted him graciously to his hall bedroom. The trouble with Aunt Sophie's

flats was that they showed on the outside exactly what they were inside—an architectural error which no true New Yorker will overlook.

As he approached, he recognized a collarless individual lounging on one of the stoops—a large, smooth person with the sort of face known as "open," and a benignant brow under neatly parted thin brown hair. Don tried to pass without speaking, for it was Jasper, paragon of janitors and Aunt Sophie's one weakness, whom Don hated with a healthy hatred; but Jasper permitted no social slights.

"Evenin', Donald," he remarked affably.

"Good evening, Jasper."

Really, this was carrying democracy too far! Better the polite and slippery blacks in his own house, thought Don. If they were insolent—and they were—at least you could seldom put your finger on it. When you can't put your finger on a thing, well, it may irritate, but it lets you out beautifully for the time being.

"Your auntie's expectin' you," went on Jasper. "Cookin' something mighty nice for you, from the smell."

Don marched into the house with a chin like some of the wonderful ones in the collar advertisements. How could his aunt put up with that creature? A janitor ought to stay in the basement. That wasn't all of it, either, Don knew. For although Jasper for the most part maintained the heat at a steady temperature, and kept the place very clean, still there were times when, as Aunt Sophie put it, he "wasn't himself." At such times there was no janiting done by Jasper, and Aunt Sophie had to scout around for a certain black boy, with whose uncertain services she managed until Jasper was "himself" again.

There was a reason, of course, for Aunt Sophie's leniency. Jasper's father had once done a favor for the deceased German gentleman—saving his life or something. If more fathers would do little turns for propertied gentlemen, it would save their children a great deal of worry. No wonder Jasper's face was benignant and unlined.

There was no foyer in these flats, but only a stair well, eight steps up and turn, as far as you could see—a place of red imitation leather walls and varnished spindles, and at this hour filled with the odors of eight hot suppers. The other eight hot suppers vented their perfume in another stair well just like this one.

Don was still denouncing Hoboken Dutchmen who didn't know enough to stay home when there was a World's Fair ragging; but, as he climbed, his fury thinned. His body was betraying him, as it so often did over here. Who at twenty-five can withstand the fumes of fresh coffee and roasting meat?

"Gosh, I'm hungry!" he admitted.

At the top landing he wiped his feet on a neat mat. Immediately a door swung wide, revealing a sort of female Santa Claus in a white apron, with grizzled white hair drawn back neatly, cheeks like winter apples, and blue eyes that gave you a sense of remembering pleasant things—remembering with a little ache.

"Well, Donald! Come right in! I recognized your step. Supper's all ready and waiting." She folded him to her briefly, and he kissed her, and liked it, too; for he really was awfully fond of her, bless her cooky-jar heart!

He hung his hat and overcoat on the dignified spines of an elderly hall tree, and went to wash his hands. The wash bowl had a blue floral border just above the water line. He dried his hands on a crocheted towel, then folded it and replaced it on the bar. You didn't just throw down a towel in Aunt Sophie's bathroom.

Only a passive lingering of rage remained as he entered the dining room. It wasn't just his traitorous body, alive for food—it was his memory. Just how did you get over a Middle-West-little-boy memory? Well, there was one thing he did know—that line about a house divided against itself was all bunk. In real life a house divided against itself did stand, if held together by the elastic cement of compromise. He ought to know, for he was that house. Half of him longed to be in New York with the gang—with Dulcie. Half of him liked it here.

As he drew up the curlicued armchair that used to be the master's, he made a profound observation which was just as original as if he had been the first to formulate it.

"Life," he said to himself, "*is like that.*"

The walls of the dining room were dark red, with a plate rail bearing china atrocities and some really splendid steins. Aunt Sophie had left her steins up all through the war, while she stitched on doughboys' pyjamas in this very room; for, after all, nice old Uncle Rudolf hadn't been particu-

larly anxious for any one to apologize for throwing stones at archdukes.

And now she was bringing in the roast veal with dressing, and the gravy, and a mound of mashed potatoes. They made cheering oases on the white "pattern" cloth. It was a lot better food, when you got right down to it, than the Italian things at Joe's.

She plied him with queries as she served. How was his work coming along? Had he been quite well? He looked a little tired, she thought. Was his room warm? It wasn't, but he was never in it long enough to catch cold. What had he been doing with his leisure time lately?

To the last question he replied that he had been forgathering with his friends nearly every evening.

"Is it a kind of young people's club?" she wanted to know.

No, it wasn't a club, exactly. They just had their dinner together, and talked, and danced. He didn't mention the red "table water," for Aunt Sophie wasn't very continental—and besides, Jasper had warped her on that subject.

"Have you a regular girl you keep company with?"

Don laughed.

"I'm not sure," he said.

"Humph! Why aren't you sure? Has she turned you down?"

"Oh, Lord, no! I've never asked her anything like that."

"Humph!" Aunt Sophie said again. "Well, I guess you aren't so very much stuck on her, then, if you haven't asked her to marry you."

"You wouldn't expect me to marry on my salary, would you?"

"Why not? There's a young couple below me, he's a clerk too, and she's a stenographer, and she keeps right on working. They're getting along fine. After awhile they're going to buy a little place in the suburbs, and then she'll give up her job."

Don was silent. How could he explain without offense that the couple below—that any couple in Hoboken—had nothing to do with his affairs? It was like trying to add bushels and cents.

"I'm not ready to think about getting married yet," he said lightly.

"Then you've got no call grumbling about your girl. What does she do?"

"Secretarial work."

"Pretty?"

"I'll say!" He could expand with safety now. "Clever, too. You ought to see the dress she can make out of a couple of yards of stuff!"

Aunt Sophie nodded her head sagely.

"A girl like that can be a great help to a man."

"Well, if you think I want a wife to help me, you're very much mistaken."

The blue eyes widened innocently.

"I thought it was the thing nowadays for the wife to work. Aren't you modern, Donald?"

"Oh, if my wife wanted to work just for the fun of it, I wouldn't object; but not to help me. I think that's the limit."

"I can't see the difference." Aunt Sophie cut another slice of meat for him. "Your father didn't take in more than a dollar or two a day when he married your mother."

"That was then."

Don dipped into a side dish of tomatoes. He didn't care for this conversation. If she had got him over there to lecture him on marriage, she'd better quit it.

But Aunt Sophie had not got him over there to lecture him. It came out over the chocolate cake. Chocolate cake is harder on some characters than thirty pieces of silver—although Aunt Sophie was artless enough, for that matter.

"Donald, I don't know what you'll think of me, but I've got the notion to go to California for the winter."

Something leaped in Don. What a marvelous idea! No more Hoboken for months! It was all nonsense for her to sit there like a hen on a nest. She ought to trot around a little. His approval was instantaneous and deep.

"Fine!" he said. "What will you do with the house—sell it, or put it in an agent's hands?"

He couldn't have fed her a better line.

"Neither one," she said. "That's what I wanted to see you about to-night. I thought you could come over here and manage things for me. You'd save your room rent."

It was a swinging, stinging blow.

"B-but you don't really mean that, do you? I don't know a thing about apartment houses."

"You can learn."

"B-but, why, everything would go to rack and ruin under me. I'd be just no good at all."

"Nonsense! The bank where you work trusts you, doesn't it? All you'll have to do is keep your eye on things, and take in the rent, and pay the bills. My tenants all bring their rent up here, never later than the third of the month."

"But they're used to you. You're a person with strong character. They'd be sure to take advantage of—of my youth and inexperience."

"They wouldn't dare. I'd leave you full authority, and fix it so you could sign my checks and all. I couldn't bear to have an agent. I always say there's no one like a blood relation to take an interest in one's affairs."

Too true, Don agreed! He had finished eating now, and reached for his cigarettes. Aunt Sophie got up and brought him an ash tray—an oxidized metal affair with a picture pressed into it, and the words, "World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893." That confounded World's Fair again! What did they want to get up those fool exposition things for, anyway? There was one going on in Philadelphia now, but you bet he hadn't gone. The only person he knew who had been to the Sesqui was a fellow with a girl in the Freedom Pageant.

Don argued desperately. Under his inexpert management, he predicted, her excellent property would go down. Tenants would leave, their rent unpaid. The plumbing would spring leaks. The wiring would get short-circuited—would probably burn the place up; and Jasper—what about Jasper?

He had her there, he thought. No one knew better than she how inexact a science was Jasper; but she was ready for that, too.

"Jasper's been himself for a long time now," she said. "He's really a good boy." Jasper was forty-eight. "And I was thinking, Donald, that I could give Jasper a little vacation before I left. Then he'd be sure to be himself till I get back."

Don had to grin. She wouldn't meet his eyes, but golly, that was facing a condition, all right! The old girl was more of a realist than he had suspected. However, that didn't help his case.

"Oh, I just can't—I'm sorry," he said finally.

Aunt Sophie was scraping and stacking the dishes as she sat. He saw the assurance fade from her face and a kind of wistful-

ness take its place. Funny, how a woman in the sixties could look like a little girl! Perhaps she still felt like a little girl. Perhaps that was the way one grew old—just in the cells, not in the heart. That would be fierce!

She rose and carried out a pile of dishes with elderly but vigorous movements. A sense of the pathos of life clouded Don. He knew that the last long trip she had taken was to Michigan, when his mother died. She had stayed for two months, and had baked tons of cookies—and everything.

Well, it wasn't his fault that she hadn't traveled more. Why drag him into it? He had a right to live his own life. He had been mighty decent about coming over here; but this was too much. Hoboken, of all places!

He jammed his cigarette stub down on the roof of the Administration Building, and helped clear the table. He felt like a dog; but you've got to save your own skin, haven't you? Who will, if you don't?

He went out in the kitchen to dry the dishes.

"Well, Donald, I guess it was foolish to want to gallivant around at my age." The words fell flatly, almost meekly, and that infuriated him. "Anyway," she went on, "I wouldn't want you to do it if you felt it was a hardship."

Don stared at the bluish stone jar on top of the refrigerator. It held cookies—fat brown cookies, such as had pleasantly helped to fill up the hollow legs of his boyhood.

"Hardship, my eyebrow!" Don swung the dish towel over his shoulder and hung the cups on their little brass hooks. "It was just that I'd be so darned incompetent; but if you really want me to try—"

And so the Hudson became the Rubicon.

The eager look came back to Aunt Sophie's face. They went back to the dining room, and she outlined her plans. She wanted to start in two weeks. In the meantime she would give Jasper that little vacation, and then she would have a heart-to-heart talk with him, and threaten him a little.

"He's really a good boy," she said. "There's not a cleaner, better-heated flat building in Hoboken."

Hoboken! Hoboken! The word fell with a thump, like stamping a seal on a death certificate.

"You're just as good and kind as you

can be, Donald," she ended. " You mustn't think I want to tie you here every minute. I'm sure you can go out with your friends sometimes, and on Sunday I expect you'll want to go to the Metropolitan Museum. You can invite your friends over here, too. I know they must be refined young people."

Quaint old word—"refined"! Imagine the gang over here! Imagine Dulcie, the chic, the adorable, with her short hair that shone like old butter brass, here among all the little German knickknacks! But Don couldn't imagine it. It was all perfectly ridiculous—quite impossible—tragic, really.

He wondered if he wasn't a little sentimental. His friends scorned sentimentality. You could be emotional, temperamental, "hard hit," "knocked flat," but you mustn't be sentimental, whatever that was.

The living room clock struck ten very fast.

"Run out and get yourself some cookies now, Donald," said Aunt Sophie; "and then you must go home. You need your sleep."

Don left at a quarter past ten. The round table would still be going strong.

II

POMPEII JOE'S was a basement restaurant with a discolored metal ceiling and walls of a very greenish green, relieved at intervals by pictures painted flat upon them—scenes depicting ladies being handed into gondolas by gallants who, though evidently ardent, had their passions well in hand, you felt quite sure. The pot-boiling artist who had done them had long since passed on, but another artist had retouched them—an artist named Time, through whose gentle pigments the smiles of the lovers took on a kind of pathetic immortality.

The waiters at Joe's were pleasantly untidy fellows whom you called by name. There was an oblong space for dancing. Three musicians provided opera and jazz—a hot-eyed violinist who would be somebody some day, a weary, middle-aged pianist who had missed out, and a saxophonist not quite good enough for a night club. It was not a brilliant place, not a place for the sight-seer; for most of the life and color was supplied by the patrons themselves, out of their own young hearts. For

a reasonable sum you could get the *table d'hôte* with a bottle of wine, and you could stay all evening long without spending anything more.

Don got there at a quarter to eleven. Although he wouldn't admit it, he could make better time from Hoboken than from his own place uptown.

He looked down the low, smoke-dimmed room. There were the usual Italian habitués with their quick gestures and ready laughter; a family of vaudeville artists—acrobats—who often came there; and, at the small side tables, numerous couples, talking business and art and love.

Away at the rear was the sacred round table, with three girls and two men sitting at it. Don was glad he wasn't going to be the odd man. They were all leaning together, and Sam McCord was evidently telling a story. Sam was rather paunchy for a young man, and his stories were apt to become a bit robust at this hour. Sue Kittredge was there—a good kid, and Dulcie's pal; Olga Vane, dark and svelte and earringed; Larry Culp, a blond youth who cultivated this sort of thing to offset the drabness of the legal profession; and Dulcie—Dulcie, her fair head rising from her blue frock like a lily, like a rosebud, like—oh, like something appropriately botanical!

There was a crack of laughter, but Sue and Dulcie were merely smiling—which undoubtedly meant that it *had* been one of those stories. Then they all spied Don and gathered him in.

"Well, old son!"

"Hi, Luigi, a pint for Don here!"

"Sit in—drink up!"

Don relaxed gratefully, with his elbows on the table. Oh, it was good to be here with his friends—his kind of people, spiritually speaking!

"I've been over to Hoboken," he said.

"What did auntie give you—toast and tea?" drawled Olga.

"No." Don didn't care much for Olga. "I had a corking s—dinner."

"Express yourself, man, express yourself," boomed Sam.

Don swept the circle of eyes with his own. He looked into Dulcie's eyes, blue, gay, friendly. The waiter poured his wine. Wine, symbol of fellowship! He felt himself slipping happily into the spirit of the place.

"Drink to me," he commanded. "I need it. I'm going to live in Hoboken."

When the shouts and groans had died down, he told them about it—told it humorously, stringing all the phrases on a thread of self-pity. They took it in their different ways. Olga shrugged, Sue patted his shoulder, the men denounced him roundly for a sentimental fool. Dulcie looked thoughtful, with pitying eyes.

"So that's that," said Don. Turning masterfully to Dulcie, he added: "Let's dance!"

They glided down the oblong, her hand cool in his, her bright head just below his eyes. She tilted her face up, and something about the way her teeth showed just the least bit when she smiled—oh, golly! They talked, and she said it was a shame, and he agreed; and then they didn't talk, but just danced, and that in itself was a great deal.

"I suppose you think I'm a sentimental fool, too," he said when they stopped to clap.

She frowned.

"Well, whether you are or whether you're not, what else could you do?"

"You darling!" he said sharply.

Out of the tangle of cooky jars and round tables one thing stood clearly—this girl understood.

When they went back to the table, the others were bent over a sheet of paper.

"Go 'way!" said Olga. "We're doing a poem for Don."

So they strolled up the room again, while Don groaned inwardly, for there would be no end of the ragging, he knew. Dulcie threaded her hand through his arm and squeezed his fingers. You could do that at Joe's.

"Don't you care," she said.

And so he didn't care—just then. There is one thing the gods do wisely—first they give a man a little hell, and then they give him a little heaven, for well they know that he could not endure too much of either.

The gang was beckoning now, and they took their seats. Sam rose and began to declaim in a "Shooting of Dan McGrew" voice:

"Let no light talk be spoken,
Nor no jokes be geijken,
For our Donald is goink
To live in Hoboken."

"To live in Hoboken
Mit git Deutschen folken,
The rent to collect
Und das feuer to stoken."

"Let rye brodt be broken,
Und rot' wein be soaken,
In honor of him
Wer geht nach Hoboken."

"That's as far as we got," said Sam. "You see it's an international poem."

"It's wonderful grammar at the end," laughed Don.

He sat in a safe, bright web, through which the merriment trickled but did not sting. He was really glad they were having a good time at his expense. After all, it was a joke, and a good one.

Then the party broke up, for they were young working people, and they all piled into one taxi and were spilled out merrily at their various apartment houses.

It was past elevator time in Don's house, but he was used to that. He climbed the five flights lightly. His room was icy, but his own mood spread warmly about him. He got into bed quickly. The classic slogan of the soldiers came to his mind—"Heaven, hell, or Hoboken." He changed it:

"Hoboken, hell—and heaven!"

III

Two weeks later he saw his aunt off from the Grand Central, and received the keys from her. His trunk had already crossed the Rubicon.

"Now I'm sure you'll get along just fine, Donald."

Aunt Sophie looked very nice in her new gray coat and hat—like a big, breezy gray squirrel.

"Sure I shall!" And he added: "Do you know that you're looking mighty handsome?"

That little girl look! He was glad he had been decent. He wondered if she knew that he hadn't *felt* very decent. His mother used to know things and not admit them.

"I cooked up some things for you. There's fried chicken in the ice box. Don't forget to empty the ice box pan. There's a chocolate cake, too, and cookies, of course. Too bad they won't last till I get back!"

"You're too good, Aunt Sophie."

"And, Donald, please don't let the clock run down. It never has since Rudolf gave it to me. It has to be wound every day. And, Donald, don't be too hard on Jasper—he's such a good boy at heart!"

"Oh, stop worrying! What's the sense of your going if you can't help worrying?"

"That's true."

She wiped away a tear, and said she guessed she might as well go on the train now. He went with her, and helped to get her settled. There was the little girl look again, at the prospect of a night on a Pullman.

He kissed her, and told her to watch out, or she'd be bringing back a husband, the way she did once before when she went off. That seemed to please her, somehow; but it made Don feel a little sad, for the pleasures of the sixties arouse an unnecessary pity in the twenties.

He went straight to Hoboken without coming up for air, by subway and tube. He decided to forego all pleasure this one evening, in order to insure future evenings. He would unpack, get the ropes, and have a talk with Jasper—a good, firm talk.

There was a thin sleet driving down on Hoboken. Of course, there would be. Stage stuff! What of it? Calmly he turned up his coat collar. A little efficiency, a little concentration to-night, and then—woof! He would manage her old flats with the little finger of his left hand!

It was queer in the flat without his aunt. He found his trunk in a corner of the spare bedroom. His feet were damp, and first he rummaged for dry socks and shoes. Thank Heaven, the place was warm. Well, first he'd go out and find a restaurant—oh, but the fried chicken!

There was a whole platter full, and intimate investigation revealed the fact that it must have been a four-legged chicken. Good old girl! There was bread and butter, too, and mayonnaise, and crisp lettuce on the ice.

What about coffee? He didn't intend to do any cooking, but you couldn't eat cold chicken without coffee or something; and there stood the coffeepot.

Afterward he found the chocolate cake, and squeezed out another cup of coffee.

He stacked the dishes in the sink. Oh, gosh, betrayed again! If he didn't wash them they'd be right there in the morning. Oh, well!

After he had washed the dishes he decided to pay a visit to the basement before he unpacked. He found Jasper tilted against the wall of the furnace room with a newspaper.

"Evenin', Donald," said Jasper. "I was just readin' your auntie's *Journal*, but I'm done with it, and you can have it now."

He smiled benignly at Don. "Well, so your auntie's went and left us to run things, ain't she?"

"Yes," said Don crisply. "How's everything down here?"

Jasper looked reproachful.

"Now, Donald, if you're afraid things ain't all right—"

"Oh, I know everything's all right. I was just inquiring. You and I have it all on our shoulders now, you know."

Good Lord, what an unlucky break—"You and I!"

"That's right, Donald. I and you have it all on our shoulders, as you say, and we mustn't fail your auntie—we mustn't fail her."

"I'm glad you feel that way." There, that was the right response! Don looked steadily into the janitor's unclouded brown eyes. "I'm sure we'll get along nicely, Jasper."

Jasper scratched his head, then immediately took a little comb from his pocket and parted his hair.

"I'm inclined to think so, Donald. Gen'ly speakin', I ain't so strong for such young boys as you; but you do seem a sensible sort, you do indeed."

Drat the idiot!

"I'll leave you my business phone number," said Don, and wrote it down on a card.

"Jest stick it up under that there beam," Jasper told him, not rising.

Don obeyed.

"If anything goes wrong, call that number," he said. "I'll be here every day from half past five to half past six."

Jasper's mouth gaped.

"Ain't you plannin' to stay in any more'n that?"

"Oh, of course, sometimes; but I'll always be here at that hour, don't you understand? Well, good night, Jasper."

"No need to say good night yet, as I know of. I'll be up and look in on you later. Maybe I'll smoke a pipe with you. I wouldn't smoke in a lady's parlor, but your auntie wouldn't be one to object to a pipe in the kitchen."

"I'm going to be very busy this evening. I'm sorry."

"Maybe I can help you?"

"Oh, no, thanks! Well, good night."

"Well, good night, Donald. Don't you fret. I and you are goin' to get along fine."

Oh, damn the fool!

Donald spent an hour hanging up his clothes and arranging his small accessories in the neatly papered bureau drawers. Funny old room, with its fancy brass bed and golden oak chiffonier, and that big marble-topped dresser with the red satin cushion in the exact center!

He sat down and put his feet on the radiator. Then it occurred to him that he needn't sit in here. He had a whole apartment now, he thought grimly.

He went out to the living room. Funny old room, too, with a red flowered rug, dark brown walls, and red plush furniture! There were crayon portraits of Uncle Rudolf and Aunt Sophie in purposely speckled frames that looked like a bad case of smallpox, and two other pictures, a pair of landscapes with sheep, done in oils on inch-thick wood, with the edges beveled and gilded.

He sat down and contemplated the sheepscape. Those animals would certainly puzzle a butcher! They were terrible pictures—and yet they did not seem so very terrible to Don, for his mother had painted them. He remembered hearing her say once that she would have liked to be an artist; but all she had ever done in life was to marry a country doctor, and keep house, and bring up a little boy.

Awful paintings—but not much more awful than the pictures on the walls at Joe's. The thought cheered him. It vindicated his mother, in some way.

Funny about a person's ambitions! The world had got along so easily without any more art efforts from his mother—but what would *he* have done without her effort to be a mother? Even though she had died, he had had her for fourteen years. He could see her now, dusting around in the old house in Michigan, peeling apples for pies.

"No, don't take those, sonny—take the ones that aren't peeled."

"Aw, mamma, I like 'em peeled best!"

Don sat and smoked three cigarettes on end. Everything was queer, when you got right down to it. Aunt Sophie off to California—Jasper lording it in the basement—Donald's father dead—his mother dead—his school friends scattered. Even his various girls—each so important for a time—where were they? It didn't seem to matter now.

He thought of his present friends—they were real, surely—talking, dancing, laugh-

ing this very minute; of Dulcie Dean, who had looked at him thoughtfully, and understood—

What was it all about?

Suddenly his eyes rested on the clock. It was the prettiest thing in the room, like a little balconied house, and had come, Aunt Sophie said, from Nuremberg. He liked it, but he hated the tyranny of serving it every day. He got up and wound it vigorously. It rewarded him by striking a fast eleven. Well, thank Heaven, it didn't cuckoo!

Eleven o'clock—he might as well go to bed. No point sitting here thinking Russian futility thoughts.

To-morrow evening he would see Dulcie. *Darling!*

IV

A HOUSE divided against itself—it stood all right, but the elastic cement of compromise was somewhat strained.

The December rents kept him in three evenings. The tenants brought their money up to him, but they didn't respect his office hours. They stayed and chatted. There were also the bills incidental to the first of a month. Even a bright young man who works in a bank can't do everything in a minute.

He had dish washing to do, too. He declared every day that he would not get his own breakfast, but every morning the toaster and coffeepot invited him. The flat got mysteriously dirty, too. Dust rolled up from nowhere. Tracks appeared on the bathroom floor.

He thought he'd get a woman in to clean; but whom? The tenants all did their own work. A strange woman would have to be watched. Might as well do it himself. Unfortunately he knew how to do such things, from helping his mother.

Worst of all were the unlooked-for things. He could cope with the regularity of rents and dishes and dirt, but there was no way of telling when a pipe was going to spring a leak.

One evening he had to send for a plumber in a hurry to fix a leak in a bathroom. The job took ten minutes, and then the plumber came up and sat in Aunt Sophie's kitchen, and told Don all about his domestic troubles.

"Marry an orphan every time, Mr. Renwick," said the plumber.

Don thought once would be enough, as

the plumber smoked pipe after pipe, and the Nuremberg clock struck nine and then ten.

Another evening one of the dumb-waiters was out of order.

"It's too late to get the dumb-waiter man now," Jasper said.

"Can't you fix it?" asked Don.

Jasper looked grieved.

"It has to be tinkered at the top, and I can't work from a height. It's my stum-mick; but you're young and a-gile, Donald, and I've got a real strong plank you can straddle."

So Don straddled a plank at the top of the shaft, while Jasper stood by with moral support and advice.

"That's fine, Donald," said Jasper.

Getting off the plank, Don tore his second-best trousers.

"You'd ought to buy yourself some overalls," said Jasper. "You'll need a pair."

It seemed quite probable.

Sometimes he didn't get to Joe's at all. Often it was after ten o'clock when he joined the round table; but oh, the blessed relief when he did get there! Gayety—atmosphere—Dulcie! Dulcie had a new frock that she had made, with long, swimmy sleeves. Queer how peachy a blue-eyed girl could look in a green frock! It brought out the deeps in her eyes.

When Don was late, Dulcie would sit at the table with him while the others danced, and mix his salad. Her fingers were so pretty! He wondered if she could cook. Probably not. He understood that she came from a wealthy up-State family, and preferred being "on her own" to small town society. Watching her, the weariness would leave his body. The wine was red and her eyes were blue. Red and blue made purple. A lovely purple light would sing through his veins. Later, when they danced, his cheek would touch the top of her burnished head.

Aunt Sophie was writing happily from Los Angeles. She had got acquainted with some nice tourist folks, she said, and she certainly was lucky to have a nephew like Donald. He was conceited enough to agree with that.

Occasionally he saw the couple in the flat below, going out to their work together. They were always laughing about something. The wife was quite pretty, but she didn't dress as well as Dulcie. He would

hate to have a wife who wore a last year's coat and wool stockings. Dulcie always wore gauze hose, and he knew they were expensive. He had heard the girls complain how you often danced a hole in them the first time you wore them.

One evening, during his "office hours," he happened to open the dumb-waiter door, and he heard the young husband below call out:

"Which lunch cloth to-night, honey?"

"The one with the blue edge," the wife sang back.

Housework, after hours—scrimping! Huh, nothing doing!

But he did occasionally think of marriage now. Some time he would ask Dulcie, when he had a salary large enough for a nice apartment with maid service. Then, if Dulcie preferred to work—but no scrimping.

In the meantime, why worry? He was giving Aunt Sophie a good time, and the winter wouldn't last forever.

One Sunday morning Don was called to the phone. It was Dulcie. "Let's go to the Metropolitan Museum to-day," she said. "Your aunt said you could, you know."

They laughed—and actually went. They met in the entrance, and each confessed to the other that he or she had been there just once before. It wasn't that they didn't adore art, you know, but somehow there never was time.

Dulcie wanted to see the jades. Curious how you always thought of jade as green, when it was all colors! They both got quite excited about jades. Then there were some alabaster jars that took Dulcie's eye.

"No wonder they used to be presented to queens," she told Don.

Queens, huh! In her dark, fur-trimmed coat and little gold hat, no first lady of Egypt could touch her—not even old Mark Antony's sweetie.

"I'll give you an alabaster bowl some time," he promised; and it was sheerest poetry, the way he said it—all the sex psychologists notwithstanding.

"Will you?" said Dulcie somberly.

Then she smiled—oh, a queer little smile that he didn't understand, it seemed so wistful and so wise.

They came around into the rear of the Rodin gallery. In front of "Eternal Springtime" she slipped her hand in his;

and then they were standing by "The Hand of God."

"I feel so small," said Dulcie. "I wonder what everything is all about!"

So she had those Russian futility thoughts too, did she?

"Search me," replied Don, gripping her fingers.

For some reason he thought of the couple in the flat below—"Which lunch cloth to-night, honey?"

It was snowing when they came out, and they took a taxi. They laughed a little now.

"I feel in a jade and alabaster mood," said Dulcie.

Don kissed her several times on the way to Joe's.

They found the gang waiting impatiently. They were going up to Olga's for the evening. Olga had a one-room apartment of her own.

It was a noisy party. Sue and Larry did the Charleston. Sam drank too much. Olga sat beside Sam on the divan, with one arm around his neck, while from her other hand depended her long cigarette holder. Sam had philosophically given up Dulcie, and was permitting Olga to catch him on the rebound. Olga didn't mind rebounds. A man was a man, she said.

Don looked across the room at Dulcie. The jade and alabaster mood had gone, and she looked tired. He wished they hadn't come. Larry's jazz got on his nerves to-night.

A taxicab again, with five people in it. Dulcie sat relaxed in a corner, so quiet that Don was worried. When they came to her house he jumped out too, although he knew he couldn't go in. Dulcie's landlady wasn't a "liberal."

They talked in the entry.

"I haven't offended you, have I?" he begged.

"Of course not!" Great Heavens, were those tears in her eyes? "Don, you will give me an alabaster bowl some time, won't you?"

"Surest thing you know!"

But after he left her he wondered what the devil she had meant. By golly, there was more to that girl than you'd think! Imagine her saying a thing like that!

By the time he was ready for bed it had stopped snowing. The air blew in at his window, cold and clean. He felt a little

sad, a little sorry for all the people who never went to the Metropolitan Museum. That "Hand of God" thing—what a mind behind that!

Yet he had read of the childish weaknesses of the great Rodin. Oh, well, you could afford to be childish sometimes with a mind like that—a mind that could pierce the heights and drag down a cosmic secret, and a craft that could immortalize it in marble! It was these people who were never anything else but little, who never pierced any heights at all, who were to be pitied—people who never asked for alabaster bowls.

He heard a window below being raised.

"Oh, Frank, come look at the night!" a woman's voice said.

There was a sleepy response, then steps. The speakers' voices, muted now, came up to him indistinctly. He pictured them before the open window in their bathrobes, perhaps with their arms around each other. Then there were steps, back into the room, and silence.

"The Hand of God"—those people below, Sam and Olga, and every mother's son and daughter were in it.

Don turned over uneasily.

"You will give me an alabaster bowl some time—"

V

JASPER got Don out of bed the next morning. Mrs. Hutchins's pulley line simply wouldn't pull, and some one would have to climb the pole and fix it. Jasper couldn't climb a pole, because of his "stummick."

"Get a boy to do it," Don told him, looking as dignified as a young man can in pyjamas with his hair uncombed. Jasper's hair was always combed.

"Take too long to find a boy. You know how particular a lady is about her Monday wash."

Don did know something about the Monday ritual. He used to put up the lines at home, "to make it easier for mamma."

"I told Mis' Hutchins I knew you'd oblige her," Jasper went on. "Did you get them overalls? You don't want to tear a good pair o' pants again. No? Well, I'll lend you some."

So witness our passionate New Yorker wearing large clean overalls and poised twenty feet in the air, with one foot braced

against a cleat in the wall at the back of the court. He knew that every one in the house was watching him. Every one in Hoboken got up so darned early! You'd think it was out in the country, the way they got up early.

He had told the gang about the dumb-waiter, but he wouldn't tell them this. He was tired of making laughs for the gang.

And so it went. Jasper didn't even put in a fuse or a washer if Don was at home.

"Some is handy with tools and some ain't, and I'm one that ain't," he said; "but the best ain't too good for your auntie's house, Donald."

Subtle Jasper!

But the climax was reached on a Sunday morning when a bathroom on the third floor leaked down upon a victrola on the second floor. Jasper was engaged in the ceremonial of the garbage, and wouldn't stop, so Don had to investigate.

The tenants on the third floor were old people, very deaf, who met him at the door in their nightcaps, looking like something out of Dickens. They couldn't understand, and Don dashed past them into their flat. He found the water running into the wash bowl, the bowl overflowing, and the floor a thin lake. Rolling up his sleeve he plunged in an arm, and brought out a set of false teeth. At once the water began to recede in the bowl.

"My upper plate!" gasped old Mr. Kingsbury. "Maria, why didn't you remind me to take out my plate?"

"I got enough to think about with my own plate," grumbled Maria.

They helped to sop up the water. Don's emotions were deadlocked. He was too angry to be amused and too amused to be angry. Oh, what was the use?

The victrola on the second floor hadn't been seriously damaged, but the ceiling above it was soaked, and might fall later in the day. Don started for the basement with the intention of reprimanding the janitor severely—only that wasn't the way he worded it.

He found Jasper tilted back in a chair, with a hymn book in his hands, intoning in a mournful tenor:

"When Thou sendest down Thy mercy,
Let some few drops fall on me!"

For a moment Don glared. Then the deadlock was broken—broken by Momus—and he collapsed.

Jasper got up with a reproachful look on his face.

"I never thought you was one to make fun of the Sabbath, Donald," he said, and fell to wrestling with the ash cans in a very pitiable fashion, as if they were far too heavy for any back less "a-gile" than Don's.

Up in the flat Don collapsed again. The doorbell rang, and there stood old Mrs. Kingsbury, properly clad now, with a little purple shawl about her shoulders. She presented Don with a plate of hot muffins under a fringed napkin.

"For your kindness," she said, with a timid smile.

A few moments later Jasper appeared. He had seen the muffins *en route*.

"I knew you'd want to share with another old bach," he suggested.

"Nothing doing, Jasper!" said Don airily. "You didn't earn any muffins."

And he closed the door.

VI

THE gang was clamoring to come to Hoboken. It was Don's turn to entertain. Well, why not? His aunt had told him to invite his friends over, and it wouldn't be as expensive as a restaurant party. Don had actually been saving a little money lately—although he wasn't ready to admit the reason why.

So he talked it over with Dulcie, and she seemed to agree. She wasn't as enthusiastic as he had hoped, though, and he wondered why, for it would be an interesting party. They could play on the old piano, and run the phonograph with the morning-glory horn. He could just see Sam waltzing around with the red satin pincushion for a partner.

It wouldn't do to set the date too far ahead, of course, for something would be sure to happen; but he and Dulcie agreed privately on the second Saturday evening in January. Dulcie would have the food sent over, and Don could bring the wine from Joe's. She would issue the invitation for him on Friday evening, while he stayed in Hoboken and got things ready.

He must remember not to let any of them pour wine down the piano keys, the way they did last time at Olga's—"to put more jag in jazz," Sam said; but probably they wouldn't want to do those wild things over here. They could see that the place was a *home*. He wouldn't mind if they

made fun of things a little—he did that himself.

So the wine was brought, two bottles at a time, and hidden behind the preserves in the kitchen cupboard. On Friday evening Don dusted and cleaned. He found a red checked tablecloth in the bottom of a drawer, just like those affected by smart cabarets. It didn't look smart in Aunt Sophie's dining room, but it would do very well.

Which glasses should he use? The red goblets with the white stems would go big. He hoped they wouldn't get broken; but she had told him to have his friends over. Great grief, his friends weren't roughnecks, were they? Dulcie would help keep things in bounds. Still, when Sam and Larry got started—

The flat looked very nice when he had finished, almost as if Aunt Sophie were there. Don went to bed tired and a little nervous. Perhaps it was a mistake, but he was committed now.

In the morning he told Jasper of the impending event.

"If anything goes wrong, try and fix it yourself," he said—at which Jasper seemed grieved.

He found time before noon to call up Dulcie.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"All right!" came the answer, clear and gay. "And don't worry, Don, if the food doesn't get there early."

Oh, bless her adorable heart! His spirits shot up. He was rather glad when one of the older clerks asked him if he would help on an outside accounting job that afternoon. It would occupy him, and keep him from worrying. Silly to worry about a party, anyway!

He reached the flat around five o'clock. Jasper was not out in front, checking up the tenants, as was his habit at this hour; but that wasn't surprising, for the weather had turned very cold. It was a wonderful cold evening, of a clearness that thrilled—the sort of evening when ordinary incandescent lamps, shining through ordinary windows, create something not ordinary at all.

There was a knot of children roller skating on the pavement. A man in shirt sleeves leaned out of a window above Don and called:

"Supper, Johnny!"

"Aw ri', pa."

Don heard skates being kicked off, and a youngster shot through the door ahead of him. He smiled. He felt indulgent toward all Hoboken to-night.

Inside the stair well he was at once conscious of something wrong—he didn't know what. The cooking smells were there, but something wasn't. He went on up. The flat was cold. He must have left the radiators turned off.

But they were on. What on earth? Surely Jasper wouldn't let the fire go down on a night like this!

There was an ominous metallic knocking going on somewhere in the house. Don had never heard that mutinous sound here before, but he knew from former experience what it was. A tenant was demanding heat.

Wrath swelled within Don, deep and healthy. He ran down to the basement. He would fix that lazy, incompetent fool this time!

The furnace room was dark. He switched on the light. No Jasper! No dancing in the steam gauges, either! Both furnaces were cold.

He went on back to Jasper's quarters, and entered without knocking. It was dark here, too, but with the aid of a match he found the drop light.

There lay Jasper in his bed, with the quilts pulled up smoothly around him. His eyes were closed, his hair was neatly parted, and the expression on his large, open face was utterly beatific. All around the bed, on the floor, like burned-out funeral candles, were bottles.

There are some weapons against which the healthiest of wrath is as water. Jasper not "himself" was one of them.

Don went up and put on some old clothes. He didn't permit himself any emotions. There wasn't time. Some tenants waylaid him with sympathy, but he passed them with a curt—

"Yes, I know."

First he shook down the dead coal. Fortunately there was kindling wood. At last a little charcoal decided to ignite, and then it was just a matter of nursing it along with a tiny bit of coal at a time.

It was seven o'clock when he climbed upstairs. He would get dressed now. He could finish stoking in his good clothes; but he didn't dress—he sat down in the living room. Gosh, he was tired! He'd better go down once more before he dressed.

The food hadn't come, but Dulcie had told him not to worry about that. He examined the kitchen cupboard. The preserves sat in soldierly formation, telling no tales. He looked behind them. There was one bottle left. Considerate of Jasper!

Heavens, he should have phoned them to bring more wine! Too late now. They were already on their way.

He went into his room to dress, but lay down on the bed instead. If the food didn't come, what would he do? There were two eggs in the house, and half a loaf of bread. He might beat up the eggs in the wine and crumb in the bread, and call it *zabaglione à la Hoboken*.

He really must get dressed; but oh, he was so damned tired!

A house divided against itself! Perhaps he had been too cocky. The elastic cement of compromise seemed to have hardened in him, like an old rubber band. It might snap any minute. No, not snap—there was nothing in him that could snap now. "Crumble" was a better word.

He must put on a little more coal. Once more he dragged himself downstairs, leaving the door ajar in case they came before he returned. If they did come they would just have to excuse him while he dressed, that was all—he couldn't help it.

But it was quiet when he came back, and there in the living room sat Dulcie. She had on her things, and there was a parcel in her lap.

"Why, Don!"

Afterward he realized that he must have been a sight to scare any one.

"Where are the rest?" he demanded.

"I—didn't invite them." Her voice sounded a long way off. Apparently all the world was going crazy. "Well, aren't you going to ask me to take my things off?"

"Yes! Oh, yes—excuse me—not very polite."

He helped her. She had on the green dress. He didn't feel quite so crumbly inside.

And then they both began to laugh, and she told him all about it, and he told her all about it.

"Maybe I took too much on myself," Dulcie said; "but it seemed as if I understood you better than you understood yourself, and I just couldn't bear to have them making fun of your aunt's home." The depths of her eyes, as she spoke, were very

deep. "My own home is quite a lot like this," she added.

Suddenly the radiators began to make Fourth of July. Fickle things, deciding to be friendly, now that the world was on his side! Don went down again and heaved great shovels of coal into the furnace with mighty zest.

Dulcie was in the kitchen when he got back. She had found one of Aunt Sophie's aprons, which went around her twice, and had opened her parcel and taken out some bacon and a raisin cake. Still marveling that such things could be, Don went and changed his clothes. By that time she had reconnoitered the two eggs and the bread, and was preparing—good Lord, could she cook?—to make French toast.

And so there was a party in Hoboken after all, with French toast and bacon and coffee, topped off with raisin cake and wine; and the master's curlicued chair was drawn up beside the mistress's chair.

Afterward they sat on the red plush settee, and Dulcie admired the clock that was like a little house. Don told her how it had come from Nuremberg, and he told her about the World's Fair wedding, and who had painted the sheep. Before he knew it he was telling her about a little boy whose mother had had artistic ambitions that were never realized, and how the boy and his father used to help with the housework. The yellow head that was the color of old butter brass lay still on Don's shoulder—and he told her about the couple in the flat below.

"Would your aunt care if we got married and stayed here till she comes back?" Dulcie asked.

"No, she wouldn't care."

Under the excited peace of the moment—a peace that felt like a combination of religion and human nature—a number of questions asked and answered themselves. What would the gang say? It didn't matter in the least. Where would they live afterward? Oh, somewhere. How would they manage financially? As the couple below did.

But one final anguished cry tore itself upward from Don.

"Oh, Dulcie, I didn't want to ask you till I could give you an alabaster bowl!"

Then Dulcie rounded her arms in a gesture that included the world—and the flat—and Don.

"This is my alabaster bowl," she said.

Fighting Back

A STORY OF THE COW COUNTRY WHEREIN, WITH WESTERN
UNDERSTANDING, JUSTICE IS TEMPERED WITH MERCY

By Harry Sinclair Drago

DAWN was just breaking. The train slackened pace. A young brakeman threw open the door and ran down the length of the car, shouting: "Bristow! This station is Bristow!"

"Wyoming?" queried a sleepy-eyed girl in the rear of the car. It was not because she cared particularly.

The brakeman was a pleasant-faced young man with a winning smile. The girl had noticed him before.

"Wyoming," he answered, smiling again and running on.

The girl had seen the counterpart of Bristow half a hundred times since the train left Omaha. It was just a little one-street desert town with the inevitable string of one-story business buildings with their "Leadville" fronts, trying pitifully to make the eye believe that they were two-story structures.

There was not a hint of tree or shrub to hide the sheer nakedness of the unpainted town. Even in the half light of early dawn it was crude and unlovely, and as like its sister communities as the proverbial peas in a pod, even down to the little bank building of concrete blocks. Here was the First National Bank of Bristow, as the black and gold sign proclaimed.

Although her fellow passengers had slept soundly throughout the night, the girl had barely closed her eyes, and now she was about to turn away from her casual inspection of Bristow, when she became aware of a man on horseback just outside her window. Unconsciously her fingers flew to her golden hair and tucked its recalcitrant ends back into place.

Even at such an hour she was uncommonly pretty, and strangely out of place, or so it had seemed to the young brakeman.

The man on horseback was quite unaware of her, so absorbed was he in something else. He held the reins of two saddled horses in his hand.

The animals were nervous and continually threw up their heads. He pulled them down, but they appeared to hold no part of his attention.

Gradually the girl came to realize that the man was staring at the building which housed the bank. He was armed. She could see the butt of his revolver peeping out of its holster. A rifle barrel protruded from underneath his saddle blanket.

His very intentness held her a little breathless. That he had armed himself explained nothing; men had a habit of doing that in the West.

She saw that he was handsome. His Stetson was pulled down low over his eyes, but she knew that his hair was black and curly. There was something wild and untamed about the set of his mouth, she thought.

Once he half turned, and she caught a glimpse of his eyes. In them there was a hint of hot temper and recklessness. These were definable things, but it was the undefinable something about him that gripped her interest.

As the train tarried, she continued to study him, wondering what his name might be and what business brought him to town at this early hour. He was only a youth of twenty, at most.

Without warning, as the train lurched forward, a shot rang out. The man outside the window stiffened in preparedness. She looked where he looked, and saw two men emerge from the bank.

They hugged the wall as they ran. One of them carried a canvas bag. It was heavy, evidently.

The man who carried it was armed, as

was his companion. Their guns flashed now as they answered a second shot.

The street, which had been deserted and quiet only a moment before, came to life with a vengeance. Rifle muzzles appeared in doorways.

A man ran into the middle of the road a block away and threw himself down in the dust. Immediately his rifle began to bark.

"They've robbed the bank!" the girl gasped.

Why didn't this man outside the window do something to stop them? She tried to raise her window, but she could not budge it an inch.

To her sudden dismay she realized that the two men across the street were calling to the youth on horseback. He rode out into the street.

The man with the bag started toward him. Something unseen twisted him around on his legs, and he crumpled down into the dust.

The young horseman was firing rapidly now; too fast to do more than make a screen for his companion's escape.

The second man caught up the canvas bag and vaulted into his saddle. The next instant he had swung his horse around and circled the rear end of the moving train.

The boy bent down to catch up the man who had sprawled in the dust. The girl saw him shake his head and let the lifeless body sink to the ground.

Men were fairly swarming into the street.

"Go! Go!" the girl cried hysterically.

Outlaw or not, she didn't want to see him shot down before her eyes.

"They'll get him!" the young brakeman exclaimed, pushing past her. "Don't go too near the windows."

But the boy was riding now, bending so low that he was a difficult target. In a few seconds he was around the now rapidly moving train and soon abreast of his companion.

The train became their shield and, as it pulled out of Bristow, they kept it between themselves and the posse which had already formed.

Wild excitement reigned in the car. Every one crowded about the windows.

One old woman wrung her hands nervously, querulously demanding to know why the engineer did not stop the train. The train happened to be carrying mail, and the

engineer, who had been on that desert division for twenty years, did not feel called on to act as peace officer—with himself in the line of fire.

The girl could see, far out on the desert, the two bobbing specks which were the man and the boy. A half mile behind them rode the posse.

"They're headin' for the Uinta Hills," an old rancher declared. "If they git that far, they'll be mighty hard to find. They can go up into the Gros Ventre range and, if they're smart, 'way over into Idaho."

Finally the train swung around a curve, and pursued and pursuers were lost to sight. The girl went back to her chair and cried. She knew that she was silly, and tried to shame herself into admitting the folly of tears for one who was a stranger—but with small success.

Whenever the young brakeman ran through the car she asked him if he had heard anything. He always shook his head. There were no big towns immediately ahead to herald the outcome of that wild chase, and few telephone wires to aid the pursuers.

And yet to the girl it seemed certain that in some lonely cañon the law would catch up with the boy who had ridden away. She would never know. She asked herself why it should seem so important—and found no answer.

Already no one else in the car appeared to care. The children were happily munching overripe bananas, while their elders fretted over the dust and heat.

It was hot and dusty, of course. She had complained herself. Indeed the West, so far, had not measured up to Audrey Duke's expectations.

The financial difficulties which had forced her father to give up his home in Virginia, with all its comforts and associations, for life on a small ranch in southern Idaho, had come as a rude awakening to Audrey. In the year that had followed, however, her father and her young brother had written encouragingly of Idaho, but this trip West had made her fearful of what she was going to find.

The shooting affair at Bristow only deepened her apprehension. Two days later, when she stepped off the train at Contact, Idaho, her heart sank. Here was only another shabby little sister of such towns as Bristow, Wyoming.

Her father and her brother were waiting

for her. Audrey drew some reassurance from the greeting which she received.

"You're going to love Idaho!" her brother Tory exclaimed warmly. "It isn't Virginia by several long miles, but it will make you forget the old place before you've been here a month."

Audrey was not ready to admit as much as that, even though she saw how completely her father had recovered his spirit. His talk was all of cattle and improvements.

It was eighteen miles across the bench lands and hardpan flats to the Duke ranch on Shoshone Creek. Evening fell as they approached the ranch. The rimrocks of the distant Snake River Range were splashed with gold and vermillion. Audrey relented a little as she gazed at them.

"It's the best country in the world for a man who has made a mistake and wants to make a fresh start," her father declared.

Just why she could not have said, but his words made her think of the boy who had helped to rob the bank at Bristow. Surely he had made a mistake. She wondered if he would ever make a fresh start. Her brother surprised something of this in her eyes.

"What's the matter, sis?" he teased. "Don't tell me you have met *the man*?"

"No," she smiled. "Not yet, Tory."

In the days that followed she never quite forgot the boy she had seen at Bristow. For some strange subconscious reason, she never thought to relate that incident either to Tory or her father.

II

AUDREY DUKE was sitting on the porch one sunny day a year later when a stranger rode up to the ranch house. The snow had gone off the high hills, and down in the corral old Homer, her father's foreman, and the cowboys were breaking horses.

Audrey had become familiar enough with the country during the long months she had been there to know at a glance that the stranger was looking for a job.

Suddenly the blood ran from her face. Even before he spoke she had recognized him.

So he had got away! There was no hunted look in his eyes.

"Mornin', ma'am," he said. "Is the boss home?"

His voice had a lazy drawl that was very beguiling to the girl. As their eyes met,

delicious little thrills raced through Audrey's veins.

"He's at the corral," she managed to murmur.

The stranger bowed low and, touching his horse with his spurs, rode off.

Audrey arose and gazed after him. How far removed he seemed from anything connected with robbing banks!

"I hope father hires him," she said aloud.

Just then Tory came out of the house. "Hires whom?" he asked.

"That man," Audrey replied, reluctant to meet his eyes at once. "He looks as if he knew his business."

Tory chose to tease her, and she left him with a toss of her pretty head.

"I hired that new man," Colonel Duke announced that evening at the table. "He took my eye right off."

"Where's he from?" Tory inquired.

"Does one ask?" Audrey interrupted.

"Homer says he's not a Wyoming man. He calls him a dally-man, because he takes a half hitch on his saddlehorn with his rope as soon as his loop settles over a horse. I imagine he's from Nevada or California."

"What's his name?" Tory inquired.

"Lance Revell."

"Oh, I like that!" Audrey declared so warmly that Tory shot her a questioning glance.

Lance proved to be an all-around man on the range. Colonel Duke came to depend on him more and more, but Tory was not won over.

Audrey found it pleasant to ride with the new cowboy in the evening or to find him in town, accidentally of course, and have him for a companion all the way home.

A thousand times she asked herself what could have driven him into anything as desperate as the robbery at Bristow. He was shy and had little to say as a rule, and yet she sensed that he could be depended on to do the right thing at the right time.

Since coming to the Bar Z he had started a small herd of his own, the surest sign of thrift in a cow-puncher. Colonel Duke made him top hand before the summer was over. When old Homer was away, Lance became acting foreman.

"That man is a jewel," the colonel told Audrey. "If ever Homer leaves me, Lance will get his job."

One evening, just after Audrey and Lance had ridden home from town, Tory led her aside. His face was sullen.

"See here, Audrey," he began, "it seems to me you and Revell are together all the time. You had better go slow with him. What do you know about the man?"

"All that any woman needs to know," Audrey replied sharply, believing she knew the cause of this solicitude. Certainly Tory had not found out about that affair at Bris-tow.

For weeks Tory had been chumming too much with Sam Swift, the deputy sheriff, to please her. Sam had tried his best to court Audrey, and had failed dismally.

He also was much too old a man for a boy of eighteen to chum with. The tales Audrey had heard about Sam were not to his credit.

Naturally she suspected that her brother's distrust of Lance was being fanned by Sam. So it was with fine sarcasm that she said: "Why don't you speak for yourself, John, and not for Sam 'Miles Standish' Swift?"

"Sam's all right," Tory flung back as he stamped out, banging the door.

He had always come off a loser in pleading his friend's cause. Tory was not ready to quit, however, and as the weeks passed and he continued to see his sister and Lance more and more together, his antipathy to the cowboy almost turned to hate.

One evening in early fall Homer, the Bar Z foreman, came in to report that some one was rustling Colonel Duke's yearlings. The cow-punchers promptly went out to ride line at night. They caught no one, but every day thereafter the colonel or one of the boys discovered fresh evidence that more and more Bar Z stuff was being run off.

Whoever the rustlers were, they were not pausing to run an iron on the yearlings on their own range, but were driving them off and hiding them somewhere.

The Bar Z was not a difficult brand to work over, if the miscreants were not molested. It was Colonel Duke's idea that the rustlers were crossing the San Clemente Range, to the south. Old Homer rather agreed with him.

But like all range men, Homer refused to be pinned down to anything definite in such matters. Gold was where you found it, and he believed the same thing could be said of rustlers.

The news spread rapidly. Audrey's father notified the Cattlemen's Association, and obtained an immediate offer to help. Sam Swift came, eager to lend a hand.

"We'll take care of this ourselves," the colonel told the deputy sheriff. "There's nothing you can do, sir."

"But you must have some idea where your stuff is goin'," Sam insisted.

The ranch owner did not answer. The deputy was getting into his saddle, but he turned and said, under his breath: "Have you thought of lookin' close to home for the thief, colonel?"

Colonel Duke threw up his head. He did not like Swift. To have him insinuate that the thief might be a Bar Z man incensed him, and his white mustache bristled as he demanded hotly: "What do you mean, sir?"

Swift was cool enough under fire. He nodded to himself exasperatingly.

"I was thinkin' of Revell, this new hand of yours," he replied, with a look around to make sure that they were alone. "What about him? He's a stranger round here."

When Colonel Duke next spoke his voice was velvety, but colder than ice.

"Swift," he said, "I'd be most careful not to voice that suspicion in the hearing of any Bar Z man. It would necessitate the presence of the coroner. And don't you mention it again to me!"

Audrey rode up as Sam was leaving. She was very attractive in her smart riding suit. Swift cast an approving eye at her, but the girl pretended not to see him and went inside without a rearward glance.

The deputy smiled grimly to himself.

"Wait!" he mused darkly. "You'll come off your high perch before I'm through. And that goes for your friend Revell, too!"

III

ALTHOUGH Colonel Duke had five men riding for him, counting Homer, Audrey saw very little of any of them in the days that followed. She knew that the foreman and two of the men were watching the passes of the San Clemente Range. Lance and another cowboy were over near the river, to the east.

Only Tory Duke had stayed behind. At a time like this, when the Bar Z was in danger, it seemed to Audrey that Tory's place was on the firing line with the men. She spoke to her father about it.

Colonel Duke shook his head, a little regretfully she thought.

"We don't need him," he said. "This is a game for older heads."

"Why, Tory is nearly as old as Lance!" Andrey exclaimed. "I tell you, father, it would be better for him to be out with the men than here. He's spending too much time in town—with the wrong crowd."

"I presume you mean Sam Swift?"

"I do! He's not the right companion for a boy of Tory's years. I don't know whether you've noticed it or not, but Tory has changed in the last month or two."

"Yes, I know," the colonel admitted. "I'll speak to him again about Swift and that crowd."

Audrey doubted that anything would come of this, for her brother had the bit in his teeth now. Several times lately he had borrowed money from her to pay his gambling debts. The last time he asked her aid, she had threatened to speak to her father, but Tory had laughed, knowing she would do no such thing.

Colonel Duke was so bitterly opposed to gambling, that he would not have forgiven it even in his own son. Had it not been for gambling the Duke family would never have had to leave Virginia.

The wind blew a gale that night. The ranch house trembled under the onslaught of the ever rising storm, and the air was filled with eerie sounds.

Audrey and her father were alone in the house. He retired presently, and left her wondering how the men, which included Lance, were faring. It was a bad night in the open, she knew.

Once or twice raindrops spattered against the windows. She went to bed, but sleep did not come to her. She had become used to storms, but worrying over Tory and the excitement of the rustling filled her with deep anxiety this night. Every creaking beam and rattling window made her listen expectantly, dreading she knew not what.

She sat up in bed four or five times with little shivers running over her as she tried to explain some unusual noise to herself. Once she thought she heard some one tapping on her window.

She closed her eyes and tried to ignore this sound, but that mysterious *tap-tap* came again, clearer now above the noise of the storm. The girl sat up stiffly.

"Audrey!" some one called. "Audrey!"

She did not recognize the voice, but it flashed into her mind immediately that Tory was in trouble. She ran to the window.

"Who is it?" she asked nervously.

"It's Lance," came the answer.

"Oh!" she gasped.

What was he doing here? He was supposed to be a night's hard riding to the east!

"Hurry," he beseeched her. "Let me in through the kitchen!"

She threw on a robe and had the kitchen door open before he reached it. Her face was white in the lamplight.

"What is the matter?" she demanded as she noticed how drawn was his face. His shoulder was blood-soaked.

"Don't get excited, Audrey," he begged. "This shoulder ain't serious."

He groaned, however, as he sank into a chair. "Don't wake your father," he went on. "He'll come in soon enough. Before he does, I've got something to tell you."

He was trying desperately to be matter of fact, but his reticence spurred Audrey into urgent speech.

"You stagger in at this time of night with a bullet hole through your shoulder," she said, "and ask me not to get excited? What has happened? Have they run off more of our yearlings? Was any one killed? How did you manage to ride all the way here from the river? How—"

"I haven't been on the river for days," he replied.

Audrey forgot her other questions.

"But father thought you were on the river!" she exclaimed.

"I know," he nodded. "That's what I want to speak to you about—and it ain't goin' to be easy."

Audrey's heart almost stopped beating. Had Lance gone wrong again? Had he made such another mistake as that affair at Bristow? For a moment she was afraid to speak.

"If you don't tell me everything at once, I'll call father!" she threatened him then.

"Don't do that," he pleaded. He paused, and then went on with tragic emphasis: "I know where our yearlings are going."

"But how did you get wounded?"

Yearlings were of trifling importance compared to what she feared.

"I know about the yearlings, and no mistake!" Lance repeated dully.

Audrey controlled herself enough to ask:

"Who is guilty?"

"Sam Swift!"

"The deputy sheriff!" Audrey gasped.

"He's the only Swift I know," Lance muttered doggedly.

Swift owned a small ranch to the north, just across Buffalo Hills. The ranch was not far from the Bar Z in miles, but its almost inaccessible location made it seem far distant.

Piñon Creek was the Bar Z boundary line. The creek was dry ten months of the year, so the ranch's herds seldom drifted that way.

The northern bank of the creek arose as sheer as a cañon wall for miles. It was a natural and effectual barrier. Audrey had heard that there was a way to scale it and cross the hills, but she had never found it.

"I've known this for twenty-four hours," Lance went on. "I thought I might arrange things so I wouldn't have to let you or your father know anything about it, but it didn't work out that way. Swift has a hidden corral up in the Buffalo Hills. Our stuff is there; I saw it with my own eyes."

"But why should you be so anxious to keep this news from us?" Audrey demanded a little fearfully.

He shook his head.

"Because it concerns somebody who is mighty dear to you, for one thing, and because I'd be the last one to jump a man because he had made a mistake."

Audrey caught his eyes and held them.

"You mean my brother?" she asked bravely.

"Yes, Tory. Here's how I tumbled to what was going on: Homer rode over from the San Andres on Tuesday with word that no one had tried to slip by them, but that the colonel reported more stuff missing. I knew for a fact that no one had got by me."

He paused, and the girl prompted him breathlessly: "Yes! Then what?"

"That finished me with waiting," Lance went on. "I was sure your father wouldn't listen to what was in my mind. So when Homer left, I set out on my own, leaving Spike on the Snake. The first place I headed for was Buffalo Hills."

"But why did you suspect Sam Swift?" Audrey asked impatiently.

"I had plenty of reasons! I never liked him, for one. To figure that he might be running an iron on his neighbor's stock didn't seem the most impossible thing in the world. He's been too thick with Tory, too. Men of his type usually have a reason for making a kid think he's the big I-am."

Audrey found herself forced to defend her brother.

"Don't tell me you've been spying on Tory!" she exclaimed sharply.

"Some folks might call it that; I hope you won't," he replied gravely.

"It's not what you are being paid for, Lance."

"I'm being paid to look out for the Bar Z," he answered, but his cheeks flamed beneath their tan. "I knew about that trail up Piñon Creek. I saw at a glance that cattle had been driven over it mighty recent. Finding Swift's hidden corral wasn't so easy. It took me over a day to locate it, and I found it right close to home, where no one would have thought of looking."

"And they saw you, and one of his men shot you?" Audrey prompted.

Lance shook his head.

"No, not a shot was fired. I had the place to myself, and I couldn't figure why that should be, unless they were away to bring another bunch of our stuff across the hills that night. I drifted down to the creek and waited. About midnight I spotted them, sure enough. They were driving an even two dozen Bar Z steers. Swift was ahead. Two of his men, Chuck Lamotte and that bald-headed Ross Duval, were just behind him."

He hesitated only a moment, and then concluded: "Bringing up the rear was Tory!"

Audrey winced. For a moment she would not understand. Pride of blood was strong in her. She laughed, then, a little crazily.

"You fool! So that's how you have been wasting your time!" she cried, throwing her head up proudly, determined to save Tory, no matter what it cost her. "You seem to forget that you are only working for the Bar Z; you don't own it! Does father have to take you into his confidence before he can sell Sam Swift forty or fifty yearlings?"

She paused, but Lance did not speak.

"A man who can't take orders and stay where he is told to stay, can't work for this outfit. Instead of remaining on the river

where father believed you to be, you've been working yourself into a fine frenzy over nothing; and in the meantime, no doubt, the real thieves have run off another bunch of steers!"

Revell shook his head pityingly when she had finished. Her loyalty to Tory was very moving.

"Don't try anything like that on me," he said. "I've seen and heard too much to be fooled thataway. Your father doesn't sell steers to Sam Swift and deliver them at midnight. In Swift's corral there are Bar Z yearlings with the brand worked over. When a man has *bought* steers he doesn't hold them in a hidden corral until the new brand heals enough to satisfy a cattle inspector who ain't apt to be too particular."

The girl was badly shaken by the logic of his testimony, and he went on hurriedly to reassure her.

"I didn't want to hurt you, Audrey. I'm as anxious to save Tory as you are. We can't do it if we don't string together. Swift 'll be here any minute now, and Tory 'll be with him. What are you going to do?"

Audrey could hold out no longer.

"Oh, Lance!" she cried, her eyes filling with tears. "This will just about kill father. Can't we keep him from finding out?"

"Not for long; he's too shrewd."

The girl wrung her hands.

"How could Tory do this terrible thing?" she asked, shaking her head unbelievably.

"Leave that to Swift," Lance replied. "The scheme was good. They almost got away with it. No one suspected Tory. And he knew just where we were all the time. It was dead easy for him to tip off Sam's crowd. Swift will be shipping in two weeks, and he doesn't ship from Contact. Who would there have been to question him? Once the stuff was aboard the cars, he and Tory would have been in the clear."

"And they know they have been found out?"

"No! It isn't that that's bringing them here—it's something that grew out of the other thing. Here, you take my gun. Let me slip into your room. When they come, tell them I'm not here. Maybe they'll believe you."

Why should Lance want to hide? The

terrible thought came to Audrey that he himself might be the guilty party, and that Sam Swift was coming to arrest him. He read the question in her eyes.

"Swift is a hothead," he said. "So is Tory. If we meet up here to-night, nothing this side of all our deaths 'll keep your father from knowing the truth."

She found it hard to doubt his sincerity.

"And you keep your eyes on Swift if I have to face him," Lance suggested. "If I make a move, he'll blaze away, and his story 'll be that he shot in self-defense."

Audrey was calmer now. She thought of Revell's horse. If Tory saw the animal, he would know Lance was inside.

"They won't find my horse," he assured her. "I saw to— What's that?"

Both listened with nerves tense. Above the wind, the sound of the driving hoofs came to them.

"That 'll be Tory and Swift," Lance declared. "What are you going to do, Audrey?"

IV

IN that moment Audrey Duke first realized just how much Lance Revell had come to mean to her. Inner admissions come quickly and clearly in the stress of danger—admissions that one might never make otherwise. Come what would, she loved this man.

"Quick, Lance!" she commanded, trying to help him to his feet. The hand she placed on his shoulder came away warm and red. Her eyes widened in dread.

"But you *are* seriously hurt," she cried, distraught now that she realized that she might have thought of this wound minutes back. "Who did this, Lance? Was it Tory?"

"I tell you it's nothing," he replied evasively.

Audrey was not to be put off.

"Who shot you, Lance Revell?" she demanded. "It *was* Tory! You don't have to answer."

"Yes," he nodded as he tried to fight back the groan that came to his lips as he straightened up.

It was too late for explanations now, but although Audrey did not know what had happened, she realized it was time to take sides. If she found herself arrayed alongside Lance, it was not that she cared less for Tory, but more for her lover.

She couldn't let him go with his shoulder bleeding as it was, no matter how near the others were.

"Wait!" she ordered as she ran to her room. She was back a moment later, tearing a sheet in long strips. Revell was standing before the washstand. She caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror, which hung on the wall above the basin, and saw that it was contorted with pain.

"They're riding into the yard," he said softly, without turning to face her.

"Quick, then!" she gasped. "Take this sheet and stop the blood from flowing if you can."

She led him to her bedroom and closed the door behind him. Before she had returned to the kitchen, Tory came raging in. Audrey had never before seen him so excited. Sam Swift was only a step behind him.

"Where is he?" Tory demanded.

"Don't shout like that," Audrey warned him. "Father is asleep."

"Let him sleep! Revell is the skunk we want. Where have you hidden him?"

He tried to push her out of the way, but she ran in front of him.

"Are you mad, Tory?" she asked, trying to appear calm. "Why do you rush in like this? How should I know where any of our men are at this time of night?"

Tory laughed derisively.

"I'm no kid!" he stormed. "Revell is here. We trailed him right to the house. It'll be better for him if he comes out like a man."

"What has he done?"

"Never mind what!" Swift cut in.

Audrey tried to slay him with a look.

"I didn't address you," she said icily.

Turning back to Tory, she insisted that she had not seen Lance.

Her brother laughed bitterly.

"You're a bad liar, Audrey," he announced. "You haven't seen him, eh? Well, what of that, then?"

He pointed to a splash of blood on the back of the chair in which Lance had sat.

Audrey's hands flew to her mouth. What could she say now?

"Get out of my way," her brother ordered. "I'll find him."

Suddenly she remembered Lance's gun. She whipped it out hurriedly.

"Get back," she warned, "and you, too, Sam Swift! You'll state your business here before you search this house."

Even as she finished, the door in back of her opened.

Her father stood there.

"What's the meaning of this, Tory?" he demanded, his face very stern.

Audrey sat down in the chair which Revell had occupied, hoping to hide for the moment the evidence which it bore.

Tory glanced at Swift, as if asking what explanation they should give. Sam was equal to the occasion.

"I came here for Revell," he announced. "Your daughter says she ain't seen him. I know he's here."

"Revell?" Colonel Duke echoed. "What do you want with him?"

"Well, colonel," the deputy replied, "I guess what I said to you about him awhile back wasn't so wide of the mark." Sam accompanied this statement with a knowing nod. "He's here, and I want him."

Audrey wanted to scream. Was Swift mad? Did he dare to charge Lance with the theft of the steers which were in his own corral at that very moment, wearing worked-over brands?

"It seems to me you're going pretty fast," Colonel Duke declared coldly. "Are you actually accusing Revell of having stolen my stuff?"

"I'm accusin' him of bein' a suspicious character," Swift replied. "Him and me is goin' to have a little private talk."

"But it's my steers that have been stolen. Why talk privately? Sheriff or no sheriff, this is my house; you can't break in here and lug off any man of mine on any charge as flimsy as that."

"Flimsy, eh?" Swift mocked. "Say, I've been doin' a little investigatin'. I thought I'd seen Revell's face somewhere. Look at that!"

He handed the colonel a clipping from an old Wyoming newspaper.

Audrey's heart sank. She didn't have to see the clipping to know that it made reference to that almost forgotten affair at Bristow.

"Maybe the authorities over there'd like to see our friend Revell," Swift laughed hatefully.

"It is Revell, all right," Colonel Duke admitted regretfully. "It doesn't say he is wanted. I reckon he'll be here if any one wants him. I'm surprised, Swift, and the knowledge hurts, too, but don't you make the mistake of thinking that this is going to influence me in your favor."

He turned to hand the clipping to Audrey.

"This is something you ought to know," he said.

"I've known since the day it happened," Audrey surprised them by saying. "I've never told you, nor mentioned it to Lance, but I was in the train that morning at Bristow. I saw it all. Any man brave and unselfish enough to do what I saw him do, needs no apology. That is more than can be said for a man who stoops as low as you have done, Sam Swift!"

"I guess I was right in not falling over Revell the way the rest of you did," Tory interposed.

"How can you say that?" Audrey demanded. "Tory, I could forgive you such a mistake as Lance made, but don't ask me to forgive what is utterly mean."

"This isn't gettin' me anywhere," Swift announced. "You can think what you will. I want Revell."

"Have you got a warrant?" Colonel Duke demanded.

"I don't need a warrant," Swift shot back venomously.

"You'll need one here," the colonel assured him. "Come, let's get down to facts, Swift. What's behind all this? And how are you so vitally concerned, Tory?"

The boy shifted about uneasily. The last few minutes had given him a new conception of his father.

"I—why, Sam has sworn me in as a special deputy. I—"

"Deputy, hell!" Colonel Duke exclaimed, and Audrey could have hugged him. "You're just a big, overgrown kid. Don't tell me you're a deputy. Give me a straight answer!"

Tory had his back to the wall now, and he resorted to bluster.

"It'll be better for you, father, if you keep your hands out of this," he warned.

"You ought to know me better than that, my son. I'm not built that way. I've heard a word or two about you recently that didn't set any too well. I've asked you to stay away from this man. I aim to find out right now why the two of you are so thick."

He turned to his daughter.

"Audrey," he asked, "is Lance Revell in the house?"

As Audrey hesitated over her answer, she saw his eyes rivet themselves on something behind her. He was staring as if spell-

bound. Swift and Tory caught his excitement and turned to look, with Audrey.

"What's that?" Colonel Duke demanded, his voice husky.

On the wall, just beneath the mirror which hung over the washstand, was a long red streak. As they stared at it, a drop of blood dripped upon the white basin.

V

AUDREY stood rooted to the spot. She didn't even try to move. She remembered that Lance had been standing in front of the looking-glass when she had brought him the sheet with which to dress his shoulder. In a daze she saw her father dart across the room and reach back of the slanting mirror.

When his hand came out it held a long, blood-soaked wallet. He looked from one to the other.

"How did this get there, Audrey?"

"Revell tossed it there, no doubt," Swift answered for her. "I'll thank you for it."

"Is it yours?" the colonel asked.

"Never mind whose it is. I'll take charge of it."

"Not so fast, Swift," Colonel Duke remarked flatly.

He opened the wallet and discovered, by a swift count, that it contained three thousand dollars.

Sam Swift's eyes were mere pin points of flame. Tory was trembling violently.

Audrey was equally excited. Lance had said nothing about the wallet. What connection there might be between this money and the loss of her father's steers was more than she could surmise.

Out of the corner of her eye, though, she saw Swift's hand stealing toward his holster. A will other than her own seemed to take possession of her.

"Don't you dare draw your gun!" she cried, swiftly raising Revell's revolver.

"Thank you, Audrey," the colonel said. "Where is Revell?"

"Yes, tell him to come out if he ain't afraid," Swift leered. "I never saw a rustler yet that had any nerve when you got right down to fightin'."

Revell answered for himself.

"Take Swift's gun, colonel!" he called. "I've got to come out now."

"Hand it over," Colonel Duke ordered.

Swift stubbornly refused to be disarmed.

"You're runnin' foul of the law now, colonel," he warned.

"Law or no law, give me your gun!" the ranchman demanded.

Swift submitted now with a bad grace. There had been something in the colonel's voice that would not brook any further opposition.

"You're armed, too, Tory," said his father. "I'll have to ask you for your gun."

Tory gazed at his .45 for long seconds, as if determining just how far he would go. In the end he passed it over.

Revell came out then. Colonel Duke caught his breath as he saw the blood-soaked shoulder. Swift began to lose his assurance.

"Are you badly wounded?" the colonel asked.

"No," Revell said calmly.

"I'm glad to hear it. I've always considered you a square-shooter. I haven't changed my mind because of something you did before you came here. Will you tell me what all this means? You don't have to spare me. Even though it strikes home, I want the truth."

"I reckon that's what you've always had from me," Lance rejoined.

"Why are you here, then, instead of on the river where I supposed you to be?"

Revell looked around at Tory and Swift.

"Well, all of the interested parties but one are here," he drawled, "so there's no excuse for not telling."

Colonel Duke's face blanched as Lance informed him as to what he had found in the Buffalo Hills. Swift and Tory were just as much surprised, and the boy seemed to turn to stone.

"My God!" the colonel groaned. "How could you, Tory? Haven't you anything to say for yourself?"

"I couldn't help it," the boy blurted out at last. "Sam here was pressing me; I owed him a lot of money. I had to make good. He offered to take it out in yearlings."

Swift was ready to turn on Tory at a word.

"That's right!" he exclaimed. "He delivered those steers to me. I didn't know they were rustled."

Lance laughed at him.

"Why did you hold them in that secret corral and over-brand them?" he demanded. "They're in your possession now, and that gets to about the same thing where the law is concerned."

"How do you come to owe Swift money?" Tory's father demanded.

The boy decided to make a clean breast of that matter.

"I went up against the roulette game at the El Dorado," he said. "I lost. Audrey let me have enough to get square once or twice. I thought I could beat the game, so I tried it once more. But I lost. I knew Audrey would not help me again."

"Oh, Tory!" the girl cried. "I would have—had I only known this terrible thing might happen."

"Swift offered to let me have the money," the boy went on. "I played often after that, but I always lost. First thing I knew he had my I O U for twenty-five hundred dollars. He threatened to speak to you if I didn't square up. I was desperate. I had to do something. I knew what would happen if you found out."

"So you started in to steal from me!" his father exclaimed bitterly. "You must have been mad, Tory. You are my own flesh and blood, and, for all I have said against gambling, I would not have refused to help you. I remember my own mistake. Why didn't you come to me. And you, Lance, why didn't you let me know?"

"I'm coming to that, colonel," the cowboy replied. "I thought I could get by without letting you know a word. I was afraid it would mighty near kill you. I knew Tory was going up against that El Dorado game. Swift's friends run it, and they're as crooked as he is. I figured that with what I had on Swift I could make him let go of Tory. That's why I went to town early this evening."

"Tory was there. So was Swift. A big game was on. They weren't playing. I hung around, waiting to get a chance to speak to Tory. He wouldn't give me a tumble."

"Nate Allen from Rock Creek was there, too, drunker than usual. I heard him say he had just sold his steers and had the money in his pocket. I suddenly got the terrible idea that Tory and Swift were too much interested in old Nate's bank roll for anybody's good."

"About eleven o'clock some of the boys put Nate in his buggy and started him off for home. Soon after he had gone, Tory and Swift lit out. I followed 'em."

"This is dreadful!" Audrey cried. "What a beast you are to lead my brother into all this mess, Sam Swift!"

"Go on, Lance," Colonel Duke commanded.

"Well, I reckoned if any one was going to hold up Nate, they couldn't find a better place than Tumbler Butte. I circled around by Alder Creek and got to the butte fifteen minutes before Nate came along."

Revell stopped to warn the colonel: "Keep your eye on Swift. He's edged nearer the door since I've been talking."

"I'm watching him," the colonel replied.

Swift glared his defiance, but he came to a halt.

"Right behind old Nate came two riders," Revell went on. "I reckon you have guessed who they were. Swift, with guns drawn, went back to see that no one spoiled the play. Tory rode up beside the rig and without ever a word or shot lifted the wallet you are holding now. I reckon Nate doesn't know even yet that he's been touched. Like as not the old mare is standing in his yard with him sound asleep in the buggy."

"Get it over with," Swift snapped.

Colonel Duke silenced him with a look.

"I couldn't stand by without doing something, remembering all you've done for me," Revell continued. "The night was black. I had lost sight of Swift, but as Tory passed me, I jumped him. We rolled into the ditch and fought it out. I got the wallet. It was my intention to go home with Nate Allen and stay there until he sobered up, but as I rode away Tory got his gun out and banged me. With my arm out of commission, I decided to come here."

For several minutes no one ventured to speak. The colonel paced back and forth. Audrey thought her father had stood the blow bravely. She was so miserable herself that she had quite forgotten Lance's wound. It made her wince to see him suffer, but for the life of her she could not have left her chair.

Tory's courage had returned in part, now that they knew the worst.

"We meant it only as a joke," he finally dared to say.

Colonel Duke did not answer him at once.

"That's what we are going to call it, my son, if we ever have occasion to refer to it again," the old rancher said at last.

He turned to Revell. "How far is it to Nate Allen's place?"

"About twenty miles."

"If it isn't any more than that, we can get there before dawn if we start right away. Can you wash that wallet, Audrey? Tory and I are going to take it back. As for you, Swift, get out of Idaho as quickly as you can, and don't come back. Hand over Tory's I O U, and I'll give you your gun."

When that was accomplished Colonel Duke threw open the door.

"Go!" he commanded. "If you are not out of the country by to-morrow, I'll jail you."

Sam Swift paused to make some last empty taunt, but his eyes encountered Lance Revell's, and he left without another word. Later, Tory and Colonel Duke rode away.

Audrey bathed and dressed Lance's wounded shoulder.

"Did I do the right thing?" he asked.

"It was a fine thing to do," she replied. "I only hope Tory has learned his lesson. He'll have to take his place with the men now. If he wants his independence, he'll have to earn it."

"There's good stuff in him," Lance declared. "I hope he won't let this affair eat into him. I'd like to get along with him—if I stay on here."

"Why—why, you're not thinking of leaving?" Audrey demanded.

"Maybe it would be better if I did, seeing you know about me," he murmured miserably.

"But I've known it so long, Lance! You've proved since you've been here that that was only a mistake. Why, even that morning at Bristow I was sure of it. I knew you weren't bad all the way through."

"I reckon no one is—not even the worst outlaw on the range," Revell said, a far-away look in his eyes. "There was Ed Hartsell, for instance. He's serving twenty years over in Wyoming. Folks used to tremble when they heard his name in that country. I guess he's held up fifty banks and the like. You'd hardly expect to find a streak of high grade in him, but it's there, all right. It was Ed who rode out of town that morning at Bristow with me."

"They captured us the third day. Ed wouldn't give up without a fight unless they promised to go easy on me. The sheriff knew he meant business. Ed swore they roped me into that affair with the story that they were in Bristow that day just to square a grudge."

"Then the law isn't after you, Lance?"

"No, I'm all square there. Ed took his twenty years without a whimper. I reckon he did it in part for me."

"I'm glad, Lance," Audrey whispered. "I want you to stay."

"Do you, Audrey? It's up to you."

"Well, you'll stay then, Lance!" she announced and smiled through her tears as she bent to kiss him. "Tory and you will

get along. Couldn't you tell by the way he shook your hand?"

"Yes, but there's your father."

"Leave him to me! I'll tell him he's to have a cowboy for a son-in-law—and make him like the idea! This family is going to pull together from now on."

Wounded and a bit giddy from loss of blood, Lance Revell nevertheless managed to arise at once for the next kiss.

Old-Marrieds and Newly-Weds

OF COURSE, MATRIMONY WILL ALWAYS BE A PROBLEM, BUT EVEN AFTER YEARS OF IT ONE MAY STILL BE HAPPY

By Rosamond Gordon

WHEN married women with families get to the point where they feel harassed, forgotten, and, with the light of glory dimmed, held to the disheartening level of home duties, something is bound to happen. What happens varies, naturally, with the temperament of the person involved.

One woman in such a mood might, while darning her husband's sock, find one hole too many, just as an old sweetheart arrives at the gate, and a catastrophe is inevitable. The ringing of the front doorbell, the back doorbell, and the telephone bell all at the same time might cause another to forsake her home for nothing more promising than a long sleep in a deep and silent pool.

In the case of Emily Stevens, it was a telegram coming in the midst of a trying day—a Thursday, so often the most trying day of the week—that topped and spilled the swaying accumulation of exasperations. It was a simple telegram of just ten words:

Accept invitation to visit you—gloriously happy
—love is grand.

PEGGY AND EDWARD.

A message in the mood of sorrow, sickness, or even death, would have been more timely at that moment. The Peggy of the

signature was the newly acquired and evidently highly satisfactory bride of Edward Stevens, Horace's younger brother, who was no more to Horace's wife than a husband's brother usually is. The words "love is grand" were, to Emily, the one hole too many in the sock, or the ringing of all the bells in the house at once.

She didn't want any such sentiment sticking under her eyes just then. In addition to the butcher's bringing the wrong meat, and the telephone being out of order, Junior had just started sneezing and saying his throat hurt again. Sonny, on the porch, was being a whole tribe of wild Indians; and Sister, having squeezed her fat little hand into a brass portière ring, now, wishing to get it off, was screaming lustily as she vainly strove to get it out.

"Mother'll fix it in a second, Sister."

The words fell from Emily's lips in patient drips. The scream ended in a high crescendo, as Sister herself, with a supreme tug, loosened the bracelet. Then, removing it carefully from the dimpled wrist of her left hand, she promptly slipped it onto the dimpled wrist of her right.

"There!" she said, admiring it as a diva might admire a diamond bangle. "Pretty!"

"Oh, why did you do that, Sister?"

But there was no more use in asking Sister why she had got herself out of one difficulty only to fling herself recklessly into another, than there would be in asking Horace what on earth had made him invite Edward and Peggy without even inquiring whether it would be convenient for her to have them in the house.

Such thoughtless acts of Horace, following one upon the other, had changed Emily from a romanticist to a realist. Responsibilities that once were pleasant obligations had become irksome duties.

To understand this better, it must be stated that Emily had always received a tender word from Horace more gratefully than a brooch; that an unexpected kiss was more precious to her than a profession of faith; and that an understanding pat of the hand across the table could carry her further, in a day of petty cares, than a dissertation on marital coöperation. On this trying day, however, although she summoned all her fortunate possessions in splendid array before her mental eyes, like jars of clear jelly on a window sill in the sun, they didn't satisfy her.

It was true that there was nothing of which she could accuse Horace. That was just it—he was doing nothing beyond working all day and many evenings to provide for her and the children's comfort. He was doing nothing, that is, for one to whom endearments are all-important. Horace had just been speechless too long.

Although Emily wisely didn't try to acquaint Sister with the result of a thoughtless act, she did decide that she would talk to Horace. In fact, as the day cooled off into evening, and the children's demands grew in number and urgency, she was just waiting for Horace—mentally tapping her toe and waiting for him.

He telephoned at six o'clock, however, to say that he would be a little late. With fine restraint, she said not a word about the telegram from Peggy and Edward. He suggested that she might get the children off to bed before he got home.

"It 'll be quieter," he said.

As if Horace needed quiet more than any one else! She was supposed to be enjoying the symphony of sound in the home; but to Emily, who had danced to a variation on that same theme for many years, it had ceased to be music.

She bathed the children and got them to bed. She swabbed Junior's throat,

though he kicked and howled as if he were being tortured by all the instruments of the Inquisition. Sonny, still inspired by tribal rites, tore through the house looking for scalps, until moral suasion turned him into a small boy again. Sister was still happy with the bracelet, but she might, as Emily well knew, tire of its beauty at any moment, and then a small new crisis would arrive. Each of the three had to be handled with great care, consideration, and finesse.

Even Muriel, the corpulent Amazon of color in despotic charge of the kitchen, who was in the midst of one of her off days—even she had to be jollied into keeping the dinner warm and tasty for the tardy Lord Horace. Every one in the house must be humored, indulged, and petted—every one but Emily. She was the diplomat in the court of royalty; but she was turning anarchistic by the minute.

II

WHEN Horace arrived, after seven o'clock, he was humming as he let himself into the house. He was a man of medium height and medium appearance; his expression, serious but kind; his manner, quiet but purposeful. He placed his hat on the shelf of the foyer closet and came into the living room, patting down his soft brown hair. His blue eyes raised themselves to Emily's as he came in.

"Hello, Em! Getting cooler, and looks a bit like rain."

He said it importantly, as if he had attended to the next day's weather on his way up from the station. There was a smudge of soot on his cheek; he must have rested his head on his hand as he came home in the train, and snatched a nap.

"Better not put spring coats away yet—it's still pretty cool."

From Emily there came no response, and he seemed suddenly to sense the cool reception that this stimulating talk was meeting.

She was standing at the door between living room and dining room, with her small blond head thrown back and her gray eyes almost closed. She felt tall and cold. She was completely silent, and a quivery chill surrounded her expression.

If Horace had made the most brilliant remark in all history, it would have been as nothing to Emily. If he would only say, "Darling, don't be cross with me; I

wouldn't hurt you for the world," she would have melted like an icicle on a radiator; but Horace just said, "Ahem!" sensed the prevailing frigidity, and inquired about the children.

"Junior's throat was worse this evening."

"What! Has Junior another sore throat?" He had completely forgotten that on that morning he had helped to hold his younger son down while Emily had doctored him. Emily's look reminded him. "Oh, yes," he finished lamely. "That's too bad."

Emily was taking a shameless delight in seeing him uncomfortable. It was some one's else turn to do the humorizing.

"Dinner's on the table," Muriel's voice came, crisp and full of command.

When Muriel was in pleasant mood, dinner was "served"; but when she was just about bursting with outraged indignation, dinner was "on the table."

Horace, however, did not notice such subtle manifestations of temperamental technique. He was the cheerful giver.

"Well, Muriel," he said, as if casting his blessings about, "how are you?"

"Tired, sir," said Muriel shortly, and Emily seemed to hear the unuttered part of the answer: "Tired of this everlasting work, no cream when I need it, children under my toes all the time, too much bossing, the stove is terrible here. I'm tired of this place. I'm going to give notice tomorrow."

"Tired, eh? Well," said Horace, without looking up, relishing his soup, "you sure didn't make this soup when you were tired."

Muriel made no reply. She left the room, her ample nose quivering with righteousness, her indignant back as eloquent to Emily as if upon it hung a sign that announced:

"I can cook so well that I could get a lot more money for it elsewhere!"

"Horace!" Emily's stiletto whisper swished across the table.

"Eh?" queried Horace, looking up, his high white forehead wrinkled in perplexity. "What is it?"

Emily waited until the pantry door, too, was closed.

"I wish you wouldn't try to be gay with Muriel."

"Emily, my dear," Horace replied with heavy patience, "it was just the other day

that you asked me to please act to her as if she were a human being, and not a piece of the sideboard scrollwork."

Horace shook his head at the inconsistencies of woman.

"I know I did; but can't you feel—"

"No," said Horace, putting down his spoon, as if looking for a better weapon. "Please don't start that! I don't feel anything about Muriel at all; and furthermore, let me tell you—"

But Emily was in no mood to hear a recital of Horace's saneness, deliberateness, and level-headedness; so she clipped him off short, and swung quickly into the matter of the surprising telegram. She demanded an explanation of the how and why of it. His answers, however, always seemed to come just as Muriel entered the room to serve, so he was hushed and interrupted; until finally, the meal over, they marched into the living room in single file, like soldiers before a sham battle.

Emily temporized by straightening books on the long table, and pulling shaded lights into being, giving the room a warmth that could only glimmer because of her manner.

"You act," began Horace, "as if it were a crime for me to ask my own kid brother to spend a few days with us." He stuffed his pipe roughly, as if it were an erring friend. "I know you should have had more time for preparation, but I couldn't get you on the telephone." Then he interrupted himself. "Here, let me do that!"

He put down his pipe, came over to her, and reached above her groping fingers for the caught drawstring of the window hangings. If only he had taken her hand just then, and stopped being logical, no more would need to have been said about it.

Instead, Horace walked back to his pipe.

"Why, I haven't seen the kid for years. Can't get over his being married; been thinking about it all day. It doesn't seem possible that little Edward can be settling down. Goodness, it seems but yesterday that I toted him around everywhere—"

"You seem much more concerned about your brother than you do about me!"

It was irrelevant and cruel, but she wanted to urge him into a declaration of faith.

He refused. Horace was thinking about Edward. His thoughts were playing around their childhood together, and Emily was shut out.

"He was going to be in Boston only a

few hours before coming on here, and there wasn't time to wait for your O K; so I just telegraphed him to come on."

Horace spread his hands, as if begging for the small change of understanding; but Emily was in no mood for beggars.

"You do the big-handed inviting, and I do the worrying," she said accusingly, not looking up.

"Why worry?" Horace's words came between the intaking of breaths in the pipe lighting sacrament. "What is there to worry about? We're all here, aren't we? The house—"

"Here, yes; but the house isn't presentable for week-end guests, Junior's cross, and Muriel is acting as if she means to leave to-morrow. It's her week, and she's been banging the pots around all day, and that's a sign—"

"To hell with signs! I don't believe in them."

"You'll see—she'll go."

Horace waved the domestic out of the house with a large, flexible hand, and said: "Let her!"

Let her? Emily had thought that very thing in the afternoon, when angered by Muriel's changing moods; but spoken aloud by Horace, it tumbled all the distress of such a predicament down around her ears.

She almost cried. She felt hopelessly in need of some one who possessed a little understanding of the nerve-racking strain of taking care of a home, bringing up three children, and coping with irresponsibility and thoughtlessness. She wished, with an intensity with which no other desire had ever filled her, that there were no such things as houses, servants, or incumbrances in her life.

"If a fairy would grant me one wish"—with her head resting against her folded hands on the chair back, she spoke earnestly to the air around her, while Horace, standing before the fireplace, listened with intellectual interest, as if to a debate on feminism—"I would wish—"

Emily broke off, and chewed the thought reflectively.

"What would you wish?" asked Horace coldly.

"I should wish to be single," she murmured, "far"—she waved vaguely toward Egypt—"far from all sound of married noises."

"Indeed!" said Horace, as if she had gone daft and he were humoring her.

"And," she added, "as soon as the two young people arriving to-morrow—the newly-weds who have so confidently embarked on their own little sea of trouble—as soon as they have sailed from this door, I am going to act!"

The indefiniteness of the threat was apparent, but it was spoken forcefully, and Emily felt better after she had said it. True, she was hoping for an angry and devastating retort—anything that would wring adequate reaction to an emotional performance.

But Horace said no word. "When in doubt, hold your peace," was Horace's motto. Although his brow was clouded with dark thinking, he waited a respectful half minute for the rest of Emily's speech, if there was to be any more of it. Then he walked with a resigned sigh toward the table where his books were stacked, chose one carelessly, and sat down.

Emily watched him resentfully for a moment. Then, gradually quieted by the surcease of argument, she found a magazine and sat down to read; but what she read was not the printed pages—it was her own injured feelings.

It wasn't long before Horace mumbled something about sleep and bed. Rising, he walked slowly toward the nightly duties of closing windows and locking doors; and finally, with a rising eyebrow of interrogation toward Emily, he released the shaded lamps from their soft, comforting glow. With just one lamp lit, the room crowded them together in intimacy, but it was ignored.

As they walked upstairs, one behind the other, like prisoners not allowed to speak, Emily was almost ready to admit anything detrimental to herself. Horace, too, was embarrassed by the same feeling. By the care he took in putting down his shoes, and by the slow tempo at which he wound his watch, Emily knew that a softer mood could easily be established; but both were riding high on their pride, and it carried them through a restrained and sullen "good night."

III

ON the following morning Emily maintained a hectic speed as she plowed through the billows of unfinished household breakers, the profusion of which, if not smoothed before the arrival of guests, might severely rock her already disturbed composure.

Horace was to drive Peggy and Edward, out from town, arriving home at three o'clock. At half past two Emily was still planning menus with as much enthusiasm as one feels in making an appointment with a dentist. At a quarter to three Junior, just awaking from his nap, was still to be dressed, the ice cream was still to be ordered, the best silver yet to be unwrapped, and a cheerful but not too urgent suggestion to be made to the muttering Muriel that perhaps time could be found for its polishing.

Fifteen short minutes to do all this, to bathe and dress herself, to embellish the bathroom with monogrammed towels, and most difficult of all, to wring from a spirit in revolt the manner of a charmed and delighted hostess! A short right angle of the clock, and she must meet her guests at the door, with a smile, and congratulate them with words that could not possibly hold a trace of genuineness!

If only they were delayed a little! But they weren't. Emily was fastening the clasp of her bar pin, to hold the soft lapels of her blue silk in place, when she heard ecstatic accompaniment to the arrival of the bridal chariot all the way up the hill, like bells on Santa Claus's Christmas sleigh. Horace kept up the merry tooting of his horn until he stopped before the door in a playful gesture of arrival. Emily watched it all from the window.

Edward stepped out first, light-footed, resplendent in a light tan suit that matched his hair, a bright blue tie, and a sporty hat. He was good-looking, smiling, and eager. Reaching back into the car, he picked up and lifted out of it a doll of a bride.

Even from the window Emily could see that Peggy was pretty—very pretty and dainty and winsome. She was demonstratively affectionate, too. Edward held her up for an instant, and, as she reached for the ground with her toes, she reached for her husband's lips with her own, invitingly pursed. They laughed to each other as if they had just invented kissing, and then Edward strutted her up the walk.

The children dashed from the house like puppies from a cellar, bounding around their uncle and aunt, emitting shouts of joy, all but wagging tails. There was a joyousness in the whole scene that needed only the throwing of nosegays to complete it as a picture.

Emily laughed as she walked downstairs

to greet them. It was a laugh at the extreme gullibility of young people intent on romance; a laugh a little quivery with frustration; a laugh wobbly from having to get past the lump in her throat.

Horace reached the door just as she did. His hat was on the back of his head, and he carried two heavy bags. He was smiling, gleeful, forgetful.

"Hello, Em!" he said, and kissed her heartily, as if he had just returned from a successful business trip. "It's like taking children through picnic grounds to trail around with these old marrieds! It was raining, but they didn't know it."

"Sun's always shining for me," called Edward, coming up to the door. He kissed Peggy again before he even looked at Emily. He got around to it, however, and they shook hands heartily. "Hope we're not—"

"We're tickled to have you two," Horace assured him, depositing the bags in the center of the living room rug.

"We're really only one," Edward said confidentially to Emily.

"Behave!" Peggy appealed laughingly to Emily. "Isn't he awful? He hasn't even introduced us!"

But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Emily didn't speak at all. It wasn't necessary for her to have worried an instant about the wording of her good wishes, for Peggy and Edward didn't need them. They were the living essence of accumulated congratulations.

"Come on along in!" shouted Horace from the living room. "We want you two just to make yourselves at home." He came over to Emily and caught her by the shoulders. "We do, don't we, Em?"

He shook her, not too gently, but his smile was gentle enough.

"Yes," said Emily, already a little forgiving.

Peggy and Edward promptly settled into the house with the completeness of being part of it. They wanted to see everything, touch everything, and coo over everything. Horace made Emily come along on the tour of inspection. He took her by the hand, never letting it go for an instant, as if he thought that perhaps she hadn't really seen her home lately.

Horace himself, beaming pleasantly on everything, was as eloquent as a Florida realtor. Peggy and Edward peered into each corner of the house as if they were in

a museum. Each thing in it was a perfect part of a perfect whole. It was as if these young people had come to hold the torch for Emily. To them the house was desirable above dreams—so charming that nothing about it could be troublesome or tiresome.

"I hope we can have a lovely home like this, darling," Peggy said, looking into Edward's eyes.

"You'll have to wait awhile," returned Edward, lovingly gruff, as if it were really too much to expect of smiling fortune.

They spoke as if they were looking ahead with awe at all the wonders and beauties still to come. It gave Emily a delicious feeling of complete possessiveness. It must have done something to Horace, too, by the way he crushed her fingers in his own.

"We're proud of it," he said softly.

Waves of contentment flowed from Peggy and Edward and drenched every one within reach.

Next they wanted to visit with the children. Edward announced that he had a gift for each one in his bag. Sister accepted her doll protectively, and took it away with her to dress and undress. An intricate set of building blocks that would hold him enthralled and forgetful of his throat was thrust on the bashful Junior. A printing device, enthusiastically received by Sonny, relegated Indian rites to history. Junior commandeered Edward's help with the blocks; Peggy mothered both Sister and her doll; and Horace, down on the floor with Junior and the printing press, promised that the first output from the shop would be personal calling cards for mother.

The gifts and the adult coöperation kept the children as good as if it were Christmas. When it was time for them to be sent off to bed, their prompt obedience was simply delightful. Peggy pleaded to be allowed to help undress the younger ones, and Emily found herself agreeing to it as if bestowing a favor.

Edward came, too, and stood at the door of the nursery, watching. When Peggy sat with Sister on her lap, opening buttons, he was transfixed in rapt contemplative adoration, like an appreciative art student gazing at a Raphael painting. Horace, standing behind his brother, allowed his own eyes a feast too. Emily, busy with Junior, felt his look, and glowed.

"Wonderful kids!" said Edward.

Horace strode into the nursery, demanding to know whether he was possessed of sons afraid of tumbling. It was like asking children at a party if they would prefer white to pink ice cream. The children climbed all over their father, pyjama-clad as they were, and free; took their falls with shrieks of glee, and finally, having wrung from a breathless Horace acknowledgment of their high pugilistic attainments, they were dumped into their beds.

Upon the last "good night" through the nursery door, the announcement that "dinner is served" was made. Peggy and Edward went on downstairs. Horace, stopping to straighten his tie, blocked Emily's way at the landing.

"You're not really tired of looking after the children, are you, Em?"

He pushed back a stray lock of hair from her forehead, and asked it like a boy who has forgotten a promise too soon.

"No," said Emily.

Her resentment had gone with the shrieks of delight in the nursery. The last shred of it left her as he took her hand.

When they reached the dining room, Horace, following Edward's lead, pushed a chair under Emily with the technique of a new bus boy in a cafeteria; but Emily accepted it as graciously as a queen, and smiled up at him, to find a pleased grin riding all over the lower part of his face.

Everything was "delicious"—that was the only adjective Peggy and Edward could spare for food. Emily felt that she and Horace were seeing themselves as they once had been, and that they were working back, as if to bring themselves into the circle of light that shone around the newly-weds. They were even caught up in the play of compliments that were swallowed along with the coffee.

Peggy served the first one.

"Edward isn't going to join any bad men's clubs that will keep him away from me evenings—and that's pretty nice!"

"Horace never has, either," Emily retorted proudly.

She hadn't thought of it before—Horace never had joined any clubs, and it was noble of him, now that she considered it for the first time.

"Peggy says she's going to make a dollar go as far as if she was Scotch," Edward contributed, almost putting money into the bank as he said it.

"How do you think we ever got around

to buying this house?" asked Horace. Then he waited, as if for an answer to a riddle. He waved at Emily with familiar deference. "This little lady stretched the green-backs to make room for it."

It wasn't exactly true, but Emily expanded.

And so it went. By the time they had pushed back their chairs from the table, and reached the living room, they were all members of a fraternal order. Emily and Horace were charter members, and therefore looked to for information. They were the models; they knew the code, and were pledged to aid a questioning brother.

"Can you tell me," Edward asked, as he stopped near the window to kiss Peggy twice—they had been so cruelly separated at the table—"can you tell me the why of scraps?"

Here he crinkled his eyes at Peggy, who promptly made a face at him.

"My husband wanted to go to Niagara Falls, and I didn't," she said. "We didn't speak to each other for quite awhile—ten minutes, I guess."

She shook her head over it plaintively.

"She wouldn't answer me when I spoke to her, the minx!" Edward took up the tale. "So"—he shrugged, grinning—"I admitted that it would be wiser for me not to go at all than to go with a sphinx."

"I really wanted to go," burst from Peggy.

"And we went."

"And I loved it," Peggy giggled, reminiscent; "but Edward thought it didn't look as fine as in the pictures."

They told it so gayly, without the least speck of malice, that Edward, Horace, Peggy, and Emily all laughed heartily at the whole thing, thereby stamping arguments about inconsequential things as utterly unworthy of the consideration of sensible people fortunate enough to be in love.

Emily, with the poignant memory of a scene only a short evening back, felt her ear tips redden. Horace, standing behind her chair, gently caressed her cheek with his hand.

"Isn't that a pretty picture?" Pointing to them, Edward addressed his remark to Peggy. "And look how long they've been married!"

That held them in the pose.

"I don't know how it looks, of course," said Emily, smiling; but it *feels* like a pretty picture."

Being in the same room with this young couple and not showing some feeling would be as unnatural as standing above an infant in its cradle and not putting a forefinger into its hand to clutch. Peggy and Edward took Emily and Horace into their confidence as more experienced travelers on the road to heaven. They gathered them in as sister and brother worshipers; and when they said good night, Emily found herself walking, with her hand in Horace's, up the sawdust trail, redeemed.

All the next day everything was equally delightful. When Peggy and Edward had to leave, after dinner, the children clustered around as the visitors packed, loudly voicing their regret.

The train that was to take the young people away left at five o'clock, and Horace and Emily drove them down to the station.

"It's just been the finest part of our honeymoon, being here with you. We shall never forget it!" cried Edward, shaking hands vigorously.

"If ever Edward does something I don't like, I'll tell him that he must act the way Horace would act," said Peggy. She kissed Horace good-by, as if that might be one of the ways. "Thank you so much!"

"Oh, no," Horace replied earnestly. "Don't thank us. In fact, you two children hit me between the eyes with something I deserved." He was solemn, like a young man receiving his degree. "I'm grateful to you!"

They were fussing around with bags, because the train was pulling in, and saying good-by to Emily. They didn't hear what Horace said, but Emily did. As she waved to the moving windows, she felt as if she had just been presented with a trunkful of jewels, with which she might adorn herself when she wished.

As they drove the long way home, Horace enlarged with some tenderness on what the "kids," as he called them, had taught him. They started, Emily and Horace, to make promises to each other, not so differently worded from those that Edward and Peggy were rapturously exchanging on the train to town—almost identical, in fact, because there aren't so many promises that a man and wife can make to each other.

Did they believe them? There are times when human beings will believe anything. That's the most wonderful thing about it all.

South of Fifty-Six

THE GRIM BATTLE THAT WAS WAGED ABOARD THE TEMPEST-
TOSSSED BARK ROANOKE AS SHE STRUGGLED TO
ROUND THE CAPE OF STORMS

By Frank Bisson

WEAR ship, all hands, and down for the southern pole! Wear ship, all hands, and northward again! Northward to where Cape Horn lifts its black head in mockery of the sailor's efforts, over the old battle-ground where, a thousand fathoms deep, the bones of dead ships are piled high!

Thrice the crew of the Roanoke saw the grim headland, and thrice they were driven back again, as they vainly strove to pass westward between the rock portal that is the extremity of the American continent and the ice portal where the arctic wind keeps eternal guard, thrusting back ruthlessly all but the worthy and able. Homeward-bounders flew past the weather-worn old bark flying high kites—driven, would they or would they not, at the speed of ocean liners. Flags fluttered:

Roanoke, of Boston—one hundred and ninety days out—bound Callao—captain, two men, washed overboard—report me—all well.

From under the lee of a storm canvas weather-cloth, stretched for shelter in the mizzen rigging, the new captain and the owner's son—a wild waster who had been sent afloat in the hope that a return to the only business he understood would help him to recover his sanity—watched another homeward-bound ship leap into view over the western horizon. She flew past as if gliding on smooth ice, and dropped below the eastern horizon almost before the Roanoke had sailed and sagged half a knot in the opposite direction. When she was no longer to be seen, they turned their eyes back to the westward.

A clearing in the windward sky, almost like a sun dog, thrust out through the massed cumuli. As they watched it, it

opened, eating up the black clouds as it came.

"That's wind, and plenty of it, captain," young Miller declared, as he stared at the break. "We're in for something this time!"

"Can't very well blow harder than it's doing now," the skipper objected, shaking his head unbelievingly. "It's a full gale. Of course, you've put a few years in down in these latitudes, while most of my time's been in the West Indian trade; but I think we've sampled the worst that even old Cape Stiff can hand out."

"It can blow harder, and will," insisted Miller, who had given his services as mate after the loss of the old captain. "That main staysail—hadn't we better have it off?"

"No." Captain Hatfield's dignity was new, and he naturally resented any questioning of either his authority or his seamanship. "It's new. I'll leave it set. She'll carry it all right."

"Look out!" Miller cried a minute later. "It's here!"

A blinding, deafening smash of hail struck the Roanoke with a roar in which the voice of the gale that they had faced so long was lost. It smote them aloft and a low. The heavy main storm staysail was gone in a breath, the rope that had edged it alone remaining. Yet, though no sail remained, the bark lay down to the weight of the wind—down, down to her very beam ends.

The wind sliced off the tops of the waves, and poured them in over the weather rail like a stream topping a dam. The decks disappeared from sight. No man could pass along them and live. Whole waves were hurtled across the rail and car-

ried away to leeward, striking the water again with a smash that could be seen but not heard in the din.

Miller and the captain twisted their arms through the mizzen shrouds, and hung suspended there. The helmsman slipped the kicking strap over a wheel spoke, and clawed his way to the weather cloth, where he joined them, unrebuked. Hatfield tried to say that it would pass as abruptly as it had come, but though only a foot from Miller his words were lost.

Their arms almost dragged from their sockets, they hung grimly on. Captain Hatfield tried to turn to windward, to see if there were any signs of a break. The wind smote him savagely, sending his head back with a jarring jerk.

Minutes passed in deadening suspense. They watched, waiting to see her turn over, for they expected little else. They prayed for a return of the freezing gale which, in the face of this great terror, had seemed like an air for the sailing of toy boats.

The fore- topsail sheet snapped. The sail flogged once, then left its yard and was lost in the gray to leeward. They saw it go, but they heard it not at all. The Roanoke lifted a foot when it went, and then hove down again.

Hail, hail, hail, biting, eating into the very cordage! Wind—a year's saving of the storm fiend's spleen! Life in its grip was a thing of wonder. The waters roared in flood over the weather rail, but still the bark refused to sink or turn over. Hatfield's numbed brain thanked God for the East River stevedores—the rough, hard men who had stowed her cargo so well—stowed it with instinctive judgment and inherited skill.

They hung on. Had they died, they would still have hung on, for the arms they had thrust between the heavy weather cloth and the mizzen shrouds were gripped inexorably by the pressure of the wind on the outside of the canvas.

The main topsail went next. A gap opened in the cloth, as if some peevish storm clown had leaped through it, leaving a few scant tatters to mark his passage. The loss gave the bark no ease. The power of the wind was too great for that.

The masts held. Their sacrifice might have given the Roanoke a greater chance.

No man dared to leave the thing he gripped to cut. A single moment unsheltered in that gray waste meant death.

Presently the fore topgallant sail blew out of its gaskets. A bulge on the weather yardarm, a mad kick or two, and it was gone.

That poor girl below, daughter of the dead commander whom the bitter sea had claimed a week before—what of her? Soft of voice, kind of eye, sure of foot, below there with her grief!

Hatfield turned to see how Miller, the prodigal, was taking things. Meeting the other's steady eyes, seeing his firm-set jaw, he was surprised to derive a little more courage from them. Whatever was bringing the gleam to young Miller's eyes was surely neither fear nor shrinking.

Hatfield wondered dully at the change that had come over young Hugh since Captain Pardon had been washed away. Somehow he felt like thanking God for his nearness.

Minutes sped. What mattered time when death gripped their throats? An hour—an hour! What was a year if this was but an hour?

There was no break in the carnival of the storm gods, yet the bark survived. Was there no end to the blinding hail, the solid sheets torn off the sea and sped bullet-swift, the merciless, solid, gray wind?

Another hour of incredibly deadening gripping, of half unconscious protest. Surely a break must come—must come!

An even greater roar, to which the souls of all the damned seemed to have added their tortured shrieks, was all the answer that their prayers brought. It seemed impossible that there should be so much sound and turmoil in one world. Surely the mad winds of all the seven seas were being hurled at the fighting old Roanoke!

The foot of the brailed spanker near them bellied out. They turned their heads and watched it with cold curiosity, without even the least thought of saving it. It was legitimate prey of the storm fiend. As well attempt to rob a blooded tiger!

The lower brail—the middle—the upper—snapped. The stout spanker was a vast balloon. Its frantic thrashings shook the mizzenmast down to its step on the keelson. They felt the thudding vibrations, but the noise was lost. Then some perverse storm child pricked it, ripped its remnants from the buckling spar, and cast them into the gray darkness to leeward.

Hatfield wondered if the end was very near. He loved a woman; and his courage

in command, a raw thing and unproved, was oozing through his numb finger ends.

Turning his eyes, he met Miller's, now cleared of the bloodshot web that had blurred their whites so long. Those eyes stamped Hugh Miller's kinship with stern old James, his father, and with all the blue-eyed Boston Millers who had fought the seas ever since the seas were seven. There was neither faltering nor fear in Hugh's eyes.

"The fool!" said Hatfield's numbing brain. "He cannot see the death that is on us!"

Then Miller actually laughed. Hatfield saw him laugh without catching the sound, and he saw Hugh's lips frame elaborately words that could only be:

"Hang on! Hang on!"

Hang on! Hang on! Any fool could say that, and none but a fool would say it now. What could they do but hang on and wait for death to take them? Nothing ever built by men could endure this much longer. If they had as crew a thousand of the world's brawnliest sea fighters, from Noah to Dewey, what could they do? The thousand of them could not tear the Roanoke out of the jaws of the gray death that held her, or lift her buried lee an inch.

Hang on, the fool! Judith Pardon below! Those men in the deck house! None had shown since the antarctic squall had caught the old bark—none had dared even to show an eyelash!

Hatfield thought that the fury was abating, or perhaps his senses were beginning to swim, when new madness joined old madness. The impossible happened—hail that flew past in solid sheets! Wind for which no name had been coined! Wave heads cut away and hurled through the air! Sound that ate all sound!

"Hang on!" young Miller had said—the fool!

Hatfield felt an iron grip on the muscle of his arm. He turned his bleared eyes to Hugh's. A grim smile, the smile of the winning fighter's, shone in Miller's eyes, and the hand that gripped the skipper's arm shook it as one would shake a friend's hand. Where had the wastrel found his strength? He had been as flabby as a jelly-fish from drinking synthetic poisons when he had been drugged and placed aboard the Roanoke on the eve of sailing.

Miller's lips moved again. Hatfield read them:

"We're nearly through!"

Through, the fool! And all the icy spite of the antarctic thrusting them under! Through, and more than half the bark's deck buried in the writhing spume to leeward!

Hatfield blinked back mockingly through salt-rimmed eyes. They had told him that the fellow was a fine young seaman before he ran wild. A fool, rather! Nearly through! A little knowledge—that was it. Miller had weathered this cursed cape a few times, and he thought he knew things. Bah!

Judith and that clumsy old steward below! Dead, if the ports had gone—washing to and fro under the drunken lamp. Judith was ship-bred and sure-footed. She would do her best for the old man.

The implacable wind that pressed the old bark down eased now and let her rise a little. Then, catching her as she staggered upward, it thrust her under again, howling imprecations at her temerity, until the cranes of her lower yards seemed to be under water.

Hugh gripped the captain's arm again, and, turning him, laughed. Hatfield saw the laugh, and it angered him. He jerked his arm away roughly. The fool! The fool! Things were worse than ever.

After another desperate attempt to put the ship out of existence, the squall held its hand for a full minute, easing down to an ordinary tearing hurricane. The Roanoke rose wearily, like an old gasping gladiator, and then rolled down, down again, under another furious attack.

Confusion worse confounded! Hail that was bullets, stripping the tarred covering from the shrouds and stays, the paint from the yards, the very oil from the yard runs on the masts!

Hugh gripped the captain's arm again and turned him like a child. Damn the fellow, he was laughing! One could almost imagine hearing him, but that was absurd; for the wind was like the roaring of all the hells, and the very rail, ten feet away, was invisible through the sheeting gray hail.

Judith and that old man trapped below—dead? Well, death was close at hand for all on board.

One terrible, smothering blast of blind fury, one last ruthless attempt to force the stout old bark beyond man's sight, one discordant shriek of baffled rage, and—incred-

ibly—the squall was gone! They saw it drive down to leeward and over their world's rim—all the swirling gray fleeces of hell's flocks.

The Roanoke rose as a sick man rises—slowly, weakly. A gale still remained—the old sou'wester—but it seemed a mere cats-paw. The sea was almost flat. Even the Cape Horn rollers had been mastered and beaten down—for a time.

A hundred ropes that had been washed off their pins trailed in the water to leeward. The ragged remnants of the sails fluttered pitifully from the yards. Sails—staysails, jibs—that the men had never heard or seen go, were missing. Molly-hawks and albatrosses, with broken wings, squawked protestingly as they tossed to and fro on the waters from which they would never rise again.

II

HATFIELD and Hugh Miller unhooked their stiffened arms from between weather cloth and shroud. Miller's eyes were all over the ship, instinctively sizing up the damage sustained, while his mind considered the quickest and best plans for repairing it. He sent the helmsman back to the wheel. A roar brought the other hands creeping out from the shelters they had found. Half a dozen sharp orders, as he leaned over the poop rail, set them to work clearing up as best they could.

He turned to Captain Hatfield.

"Well, she stuck it out, eh? Not very much the worse, as far as I see. It'll mean bending the second best suit of sails, and we'll have to give them very tender handling. Are you going down to see how things are in the cabin—how Miss Pardon has fared—or shall I?"

"I'll go."

"Right! I'll do what I can on deck. When you're changed, you might slip out and let me get into dry things. Can't leave the boson in charge of a mess like this!"

Hatfield nodded like a tired man. His eyes were rimmed as red as blood. He seemed to have aged years in an hour or two. Turning without a word, he went below.

A foot of icy brine met him at the foot of the companionway. Merron, the old steward, was crawling round the long saloon, gripping nervously at the teak handrail that ran down either side. He looked the picture of abject misery.

"Have to have some help to get this water bailed out, sir," he whined. "Had an awful—"

But Hatfield had passed into his berth. The door closed. A cork popped.

"Getting too fond of that stuff," Merron muttered. "Since Captain Pardon went, and he got control of the ship's stock, he's given it a rougher time than young Miller used to do when he came aboard. Ought to be out on deck, looking after his job. Looks scared to death. Not much in him! Well, I must try and get Miss Pardon something hot fixed up. A real girl, that! I'd 'a' been broken up or drownded, only for her. Ah, the cork's out again! Could do with one meself, God knows!"

Judith Pardon came out of the little berth that had been her home for years. She looked pale and worn; and well she might, for, bad as things had been on deck, they were worse below. With the Roanoke on her beam ends, the deck of her stateroom had become her wall, her wall her deck. Everything movable had been pitched down and tossed about. The inrush of the sea water had reached the big coal stove that kept the whole place warm. The fumes, when fire and water met, were suffocating.

With Merron she had done what she could to keep things from going to utter ruin. Down there, with all means of reaching the deck cut off, it seemed useless to try to save her possessions when they themselves hoped for no salvation; but habit is strong. Now she went with Merron to sort out the few pieces of crockery that had escaped from the general wreckage. Hatfield found her there when, revived and changed, he tardily came out to relieve Hugh Miller on deck.

"Are you all right, Miss Pardon?" he asked huskily.

"Quite, thank you," she replied, with a little *moue*, as the fumes of the spirit spread. "Things look bad on deck, don't they? It will take a day or two to get them into trim again."

"We'll trim up in Port Stanley," Hatfield informed her.

"Port Stanley! The Falklands! Surely, Mr.—Captain Hatfield, we are not running back hundreds of miles for the loss of a few sails?"

"I don't quite see where you get the 'we,'" Hatfield grinned. "I decide here, I think."

"I understand, captain. You have made it very evident that my standing here has altered since my father's death."

"Well, that's your fault. I'm willing to be friends with you, and I should think my friendship was better worth cultivating than a washout's like Miller!"

"He seems to be looking after the ship, while you look after yourself," Judith shot back coolly. "However, that's his business."

"My word, missy!" Merron cried, as Hatfield went out. "If there's one thing James Miller would never forgive a skipper for doing, it's for running back while there's any hope of carrying on. He'll fire Captain Hatfield by cable—you mark my words!"

"Oh, listen!" Judith cried a few minutes later. "They're at it hard and heavy outside."

And they were. Hugh Miller's sense of sound seamanship revolted against giving in to the Horn. A fair slant of wind—and such blessings came occasionally—would see them around it in a day or so.

"Your spars are all right," he pointed out. "The second best suit of sails isn't bad. Carry on, man!"

"I'm squaring away for Stanley under reefed upper topsails and mainsail in less than half an hour. My say goes here. If you don't like things as I run them, you can get out at Port Stanley and find your way home to pa. He might kill the fatted calf—"

"Cut that out, you cur, or I'll make veal of you!" Miller snapped. "You're half seas over now. As soon as I've changed, I'll be out. You can square away for the Falklands then, and be damned to you, you yellow beast!"

He turned on his heel and went below.

"Look here, Judith girl," he told her, when they had the cabin to themselves, "I'll swallow any pride that stands in the way and cable to dad for money to pay my passage home, and yours. You can't go on in this ship—the only woman aboard—when she sails from Port Stanley. Your father was a good servant of dad's, and the least he can do is to see that your way home is made smooth. Maybe, some day, when I've got back to where I should be aboard ship—but I haven't the right to speak yet. I'll go out and help to get her squared away. Then I'll send some of the hands in to dry up the cabin."

"Square away!" sounded along the decks soon afterward. With the wind aft, and the seas running smoothly behind, the Roanoke made easy weather of what had been a heartbreaking beat. Sails, long furled, were loosed, and lost their stiff creases as the halyards stretched. The hands—caring little who made or lost money, so long as the eastward course gained them a respite from the travail of the savage Horn—moved joyfully around, chanteying and hauling. "Whisky Johnny" sent the fore-topsail yard to the mast-head. "Reuben Ranzo" lifted the main. The fore sheets came aft to "Paddy Doyle's Boots." The missing lower topsails and topgallant sail reminded them of gaps in a row of teeth.

The log showed a steady ten knots. The motion was long and easy. The life lines that had so long been stretched along the decks were cast off and bundled below, out of the way.

Hugh, like all on board, felt the ease of the change, but he knew that it was the ease of the fighter who refuses battle. His standing being too indefinite to give him any further right to claim a voice in directing matters, he took Hatfield's orders quietly, determined to let things shape themselves when the anchor dropped, with the ship in port..

Running under the lee of East Falkland, clear of the big seas, the Roanoke behaved so decorously that it was hard to believe her the ship that had been half under water for months. Lying over at no more than a comfortable angle, she kept dry decks and a steady pace. The anchors were hung to the catheads, the cables ranged for running along the decks. Hatfield left the work to Miller and the boatswain, for the skipper's new-found dignity was too precious a thing to be soiled with rusty chains. The ruddy hue of his features, too, showed that he was doing justice to the ship's spirit stores.

They opened up Port Stanley Harbor at four bells in the afternoon watch of the third day since they turned back from the Horn. Running smoothly past the outer reef, they reached their anchorage an hour later. Hugh had his yards squared, his sails furled, and everything shipshape, before the first shore boat bumped alongside the ladder.

Hatfield met the visitors at the gangway and led them into the cabin. Hugh hung

about the deck until he saw Judith emerge from the companionway that led out to the poop. They hung, chatting quietly and happily, over the stern rail, each wondering what the next few days or hours might bring. Hugh had enough to pay for the cable he intended sending. After that—well, luck didn't always run the wrong way.

"I could perhaps get some work here," she suggested. "There must be openings for those willing to try their hands at anything."

"Wait, Judith! Stay aboard until I know my fate. Dad's not really hard; but I'm afraid I tried his patience. However, that sort of thing's of the past."

"You're sure, Hugh?" she smiled.

Miller nodded, quietly and confidently.

"Quite. It was only a mad phase—the result of too much money and too little occupation. I'm finished with all that. Stay here, Judith. There's one of the shore fellows coming out. I'll get him to cable for me."

The answer came next morning, but it was not from James Miller. The old man had joined his fathers three months before, and his manager frantically appealed to the heir to return by the first steamer.

Any lingering doubt of Hugh's ability to cut drink out of his life was dispelled by the knowledge that his father had died

without knowing that his only son had cast out his devil, and was again the boy of whom James Miller had been so proud. The sum the manager had cabled made the matter of his—and Judith's—return an easy one.

"Well, I see you got your cable," Hatfield grinned, as Hugh came out of his berth. "Going home to pa?"

"My father is dead," Hugh replied quietly. "I am the owner of this ship. I intend to appoint a new master for her as soon as possible. You may either remain as mate or get out and find your way home as best you can—not a hard job for a sailor."

"Why can't I hold my job as master?" Hatfield demanded.

His world had suddenly turned turtle, but he thought he could scramble to safety. Miller's next words thoroughly disabused his mind of this fallacy.

"Because you can't carry on in a gale. Miss Pardon and I will leave as soon as we're packed. We'll go north as man and wife. Do you stay as mate?"

Hatfield struggled with himself for a pregnant minute. To go out as things stood meant professional suicide. To remain meant a chance to retrieve his mistake.

"Yes, sir," he answered thankfully and humbly.

THE GAME

I SHALL play a game with Life,
As one plays a game of chess:
Shall Life win, or I—
Who can guess?

The days, the weeks, the months,
Are moving at my command;
Short hours strut the board
'Neath my hand.

As Life sits grimly by,
This moment is mine to play;
Swiftly I move—and Life
Takes it away.

He has taken all my years,
He plays the old game well;
Yet I may win in the end—
Who can tell?

I shall play the game with joy,
And jest at the willing strife;
Whether I win or lose—
Your move, Life!

Grace Noll Crowell

Happy Harry

A STORY POINTING OUT A ROAD TO SUCCESS IN LIFE WHICH
DOES NOT SEEM TO BE AT ALL IN ACCORDANCE
WITH THE ACCEPTED COPYBOOK MAXIMS

By Ellis Parker Butler

IF you ever come to Riverbank, some one will point out Happy Harry Heathcote and tell you with pride that in him you see just about the smoothest article to be found anywhere.

"There's the man," he will say, "who can take it away from the wisest on earth, and take it away in chunks. Don't come talking about your *Denrys* and *Wallingfords*—that's Happy Harry Heathcote!"

"What about him?" you may ask.

What you will see will be a young fellow with a laughing face, six feet tall, built like a college full back. When you hear him, you will hear a man with a voice like a merry bull and a laugh that echoes and makes other men smile. He throws back his head when he laughs, and his voice can be heard from one end of Main Street to the other. When he whispers a secret, the people in the next house know all about it.

Every one likes him, but every one is a little afraid of his handshake, because it is so hearty and bone crushing. He has the reputation in Riverbank of having walked right in among the wise ones and taken their money away from them while their eyes were open.

I know Happy Harry somewhat better than most, and I know the truth about him. I know how he got his start.

Harry and I were kids together in Riverbank. He had no sense then. All he had was good nature and helplessness. When he fell down and hit his face on the street, he laughed. When he learned to swim, he did it by going out to the end of the spring-board and swinging his arms for a jump into the creek—the deepest part.

"Say! Say!" he shouted. "I don't know how to swim! You've got to show me!"

Then he jumped. In a second we were all around him, holding his head above water, buoying him up, showing him how to kick out and how to make strokes. A few years later he won the town swimming championship away from all of us. That was Happy Harry, and that was his secret—helplessness.

He took our help good-naturedly, and laughed at himself for being such a dub at everything. We helped him through High School, and then he became the town's protégé. Rath Carter worked with him many long nights, trying to teach him to keep Rath's simple books, and then worried around until he found a job for him in Vincent's store. That made him Vincent's responsibility. When he found that Happy was breaking more crockery than his wages came to, Vincent hunted him a job at Brice-Beeman's; and so it went.

During this passing down the line Happy Harry became a member of the Tulips, our best and most costly club. Beeman put him in, I think. In the club the one talent Happy Harry had came to the fore—he could whang a tambourine at the end of the row of black-faces in the club's minstrel show, and laugh at the jokes in a way that made every one in the audience join in and have a grand laughing time.

The first time Harry was in the minstrels the audience was so merry that the show had to be given twice again, and after that he was a club asset. The club needed the money, and its annual minstrel show was the way it got it. After Harry had been in the show once, people asked:

"Is Harry Heathcote going to be in it?"

When told that he was, they always bought tickets.

You can see what he was like—a great

big laughing and lumbering elephant, putting his foot in his water tub and upsetting it, and looking around helplessly and happily for some one to bring him a new tub and fresh water. He expected people to do things for him, and so they did them.

His story, up to a point, is the story of his courtship of Bessie Graham. No—that's not quite the way to put it. In the beginning he did not court Bessie; nobody courted anybody.

Bessie Graham was a neat little body, rather demure and decidedly pretty. She was quieter than most of the girls, and inclined to be serious, although willing to have a share of honest fun. For two years Nat Parker, cashier of the Riverbank National Bank, had been courting her in the efficient way in which he did everything. He was ten years her elder, which was not too much, and they made a pretty pair. We all understood they were to marry one of these days.

One evening in midsummer Bessie and Nat were on Bessie's porch, and Bessie had just been to the kitchen, where she had made a big pitcher of lemonade. She brought it to the porch on a tray, with slices of cake on a plate, and two clean napkins. She had just put the tray on the porch table when Nat saw Happy Harry going by. It was a hot evening—thermometer up to ninety. Happy had his coat thrown over his left arm, and was fanning himself with his straw hat.

"There's Harry," Nat said, as he took a glass from Bessie. "He looks hot; have you enough to give him a drink?"

"Oceans," said Bess. "Call him, Nat!"

So Nat called to Harry, and Harry called back, in a voice that boomed all over the ward.

"Will I?" he chortled. "Ice lemonade? Watch me come!"

Putting his hands on the gatepost, he vaulted over the gate, which no one but Harry Heathcote or a boy would have done on such a hot night, and which Nat could not have done at any time. In another minute he was seated on the porch steps, drinking lemonade and "joshing" Nat and Bessie. That was what Harry himself called it, and it was his favorite form of conversation. He could not be serious.

Nat Parker was nothing but serious. He was one of the men with an extra high forehead.

"By gollies, it does me good to see you

two sitting here like two turtle doves," said Happy. "I've been sweating around a pool table down at the club. Hot? My!"

"Listen, Harry," Nat said seriously. "You ought to get married yourself. It's what you need, Harry. Isn't that so, Bess?"

She said it was, and they went on talking. Harry threw back his head, laughed as if it was a great joke, and said that he would no more know how to court a girl than a cow knows how to make paper flowers. He told about the time he sat next to Emma Douglas at the straw ride, and thought he ought to hug her, and broke her rib. He opened his mouth and laughed loud at that.

"I don't dare come up on your porch," he said, "or I'd step on your foot and mash it. My gollies, the girls all run when I come toward 'em!"

"You're so rough and noisy—that's why, Harry," Nat told him; "but they all like you—don't they, Bess?"

"You say such awful things to them," Bess told him. "You make such terrible jokes and laugh at them so. That's no way to do with a girl. Some one ought to tell you how to behave."

"Who would?" asked Harry. "Tell me where I can hire me a teacher!"

"Bess can tell you a few things," Nat said quite seriously.

"You really ought to let me, Harry," she said.

That, as far as I have heard any of them say, was practically all there was to it. Nat was in earnest, and Bessie was in earnest, and both were like all the rest of us when Happy Harry was concerned. He could not do these things unassisted, and so we had to help him.

II

HARRY's lessons began as a series of lectures of a sort, with Harry on the porch steps and Bess and Nat sitting on the porch, and Harry's big laugh ringing out at what he thought was funny. One evening, after a week or two of this, Bess asked Nell Streeter to come over, and then Bess and Nat went for a walk and left Nell and Harry together. When they returned, Harry was sitting on the steps alone.

"Where's Nell?" Bess asked.

"She went home," said Harry. "I told her a story, and she got mad and went home."

"Harry!" Bess cried.

"Well, it was only the story I told you, Bess—the one about the twins," Harry said.

"But my gracious, Harry, Nell is a twin," Bess told him. "Nat, he's simply hopeless. Nobody would put up with him if Nell wouldn't. I never heard of such crazy tactlessness as telling Nell that twin story. Harry, no girl will ever put up with you—not a girl!"

The result was the same as in all the other troubles in which Harry found himself. Bess tried a few other girls, but saw that it was hopeless, or seemed so, and she began giving Harry some of her own time. In a couple of months she told Nat Parker that she was sorry, but she and Harry were engaged.

"Please forgive me, Nat," she begged. "I do like you—I like you ever so much; but I'm so sorry for Harry! You can get lots of other girls, Nat dear, better girls than I am, but Harry has only me. You will forgive me, Nat? Say you forgive me!"

"I saw it coming," Nat told her.

On the evening when Bess had this talk with Nat, Harry was at the Tulip Club, and he braced Ben Farcome in a corner of the card room. For once in his life Happy Harry was close to seriousness.

"I've got to talk to you, Ben," he said. "I want you to tell me what to do. I've got engaged—to Bess Graham."

"Congratulations! She's a fine girl," Ben Farcome said. "What have I to do with it?"

Ben Farcome was about Nat Parker's age, and was one of his set. He was also president of the Tulip Club, and he had a good business—"loans and insurance," his sign said. He was a keen, hard-headed business man and a bachelor. He had connections in the East that gave him money to loan on farms, and it was said about town that he would some day be Riverbank's richest man.

"I've got to have some one tell me what to do," said Happy Harry, pushing Ben into a chair. "I can't get married on what I'm getting, and you know that, Ben. I've got mother to support. What ought I to do about it?"

Farcome lighted a cigar and began asking questions. Harry was working for the Hart Garage just then, trying to sell automobiles on commission. He told Ben what

he was making, and Ben saw that it was not enough. There was no position in town that Harry could get, as far as Ben knew, that would enable him to support a wife properly; but when Harry suggested going away from Riverbank to look for a paying job, Ben shook his head.

"You mustn't do that, Harry," he said, thinking of the annual minstrel shows. "We'll have to find something. You let me think it over."

A few minutes later he heard Harry's hearty laughter in the billiard room, and he strolled in there.

"You don't seem to be worrying much," he said a little sourly.

"Over what we were talking about?" Harry asked. "No, sir! That's off my mind now. You're going to take care of that, ain't you, Ben?"

Ben did. For quite awhile he had been thinking of dropping the insurance end of his business, because the loans were getting to be all he could handle, for he was buying and selling real estate in Riverbank and in Florida. As he tried to think of some better job for Harry, it came into his mind that he might turn his insurance department over to Harry—give it to him, in fact.

He did just that. He took Harry into his office for a few weeks, taught him all he could, and then saw that he fixed up his new office conveniently and had an efficient girl to help him. He beat down the rent of a ground floor office from one hundred and twenty-five to ninety-eight dollars a month. For several weeks after Harry began doing business he went across the street several times a day to see that things were not being tangled.

The insurance business, rather naturally, did not pay very well at first. Ben had let it run down a good deal, and had lost some of his patrons. For a month or so Ben Farcome actually worked harder on Harry's business than he had worked on it when it belonged to him.

"You got me into it; help me make it go," Harry seemed to say. "Don't blame me; I only took your advice."

For Ben Farcome did feel responsible. All of us, in Riverbank, had the feeling that we were responsible for Harry Heathcote; but Ben was surely surprised when Harry came into his office one afternoon with a new trouble.

"What's the matter now?" Ben asked. "I thought the business was going in fine

shape," he said, as he saw Harry's worried look.

"Fine? I'll say it is!" declared Harry. "I've just got the whole insurance for the Berman Mills—got my commission right spang in Nat's bank this minute—five thousand cold plunkey dollars, Ben; but Ben—"

"What is it?"

"I've got to buy me a house," Harry said. "I can't jam Bess and mother in that shack I'm living in now. There's no room in it. How can I buy me a house with five thousand dollars, Ben?"

"Easy enough," Farcome said. "You can get a fine house for five thousand, leaving the rest on mortgage."

"I don't know anything about that sort of business," Harry said. "You buy me a house, will you, Ben? You know all about mortgages and houses here in Riverbank."

"You buy your own house," said Ben.

"It's none of my business."

"But it certainly is!" declared Happy Harry. "I wouldn't have stayed here in Riverbank if it hadn't been for you, Ben, and you know it. Listen, Ben—shall I give you my check for five thousand now or later on?"

Ben Farcome made lines on his blotter with the point of his letter opener.

"I'll tell you, Harry," he said. "I'll do this for you. I know the house you ought to buy, and it is the biggest bargain in Riverbank—the biggest bargain in Riverbank real estate that has come on the market in twenty years. I happened to hear of it this morning, and no one knows of it yet. It's the Marples house on Sixth Street. Marples has to have the money, and he has to have it quick, and he'll sell for fifteen thousand dollars."

"By gollies, that's a real house," said Harry enthusiastically. "Bess will be tickled to death!"

"He wants all cash," continued Ben soberly; "but I'll tell you what I'll do, Harry. I want you to have that house, and then you'll have a good house, and one that you can sell for more than you paid for it at any time. I'll put up the ten thousand and take back a mortgage from you, and you put in the five thousand."

"Attaboy!" cried Harry, and he drew his check book from his pocket.

"Don't you want to look at the house first?" Ben asked him.

"What do I know about houses?" Harry

demanded. "I'm leaving this to you, Ben. I'm letting you tell me."

"You'll never regret it," Ben assured him. "I would have bought it myself, as a speculation, if you hadn't wanted it."

"There you are," said Happy Harry, handing him the check. "That's practically all the money I've got, Ben. I've got to make some more before Bess and I can be married."

III

It was about a week later that Happy Harry came into Ben's office with the Florida letter. Ben was busily engaged in going over some mortgage loan papers, and he frowned as he looked up and saw Harry, but he pushed the papers aside and turned his chair.

"What's the trouble now?" he asked.

"I don't know that it's trouble," Harry said cheerfully. "It may be joy," and he laughed as if he had made a good joke. "Cast your bright eyes over this letter, Ben, and tell me what you think of it."

Farcome leaned back in his chair, pulled the letter from its long envelope, and gathered the inclosed snapshots and small maps into his free hand for later attention. Harry sat on the edge of his friend's desk, swinging his foot, and punching holes in the desk blotter with Ben's letter opener.

When Farcome had read the letter, he looked at the snapshots carefully, and then at Harry.

"How'd this man come to write to you?" he asked.

"He's a cousin of mine—a sort of second cousin," Harry told him.

"What's this about his wanting the money quickly. Is that so?"

"Yes, I know his wife, too," Harry said. "By gollies, she's a restless bird! Whistling hen, Ben. That's so, what she says about wanting her girl to be an opera star, and to go to Paris and study, and all that. What do you think of the proposition, Ben? Does it look like good money to you?"

"It certainly does, Harry," Farcome told him. "I know that piece of Florida property as well as I know my own down there. It's the next but one from mine, and the bungalow is new and well built. At twenty thousand dollars I would call that the biggest bargain in the State of Florida. I just wondered why he hadn't offered it to me. I offered him eighteen

thousand for it the last time I was down there. I'd give him twenty any day in the year."

"He says he thought he'd offer it to me first," said Harry. "Do you think I ought to buy it, Ben?"

"I think somebody ought to buy it," Farcome said. "Whoever does buy it can sell it for forty thousand, possibly for fifty thousand, inside of a year. That's sure! I wouldn't sell my piece for forty, and this is better—it's right on the canal."

"Yes, but how are you going to get me the twenty thousand dollars, Ben?" Harry asked. "Are you going to lend it to me on my house?"

"On your house?" cried Farcome. "You couldn't borrow five thousand more on your house. You couldn't borrow two thousand more on it."

"That so?" Harry asked carelessly. "I never thought much about it. What are you going to lend it to me on, Ben? You wouldn't just lend me that much offhand, would you?"

"I would not! I wouldn't lend anybody twenty thousand dollars on an unsupported note."

"How would it be to lend it to me on my business?" asked Harry.

Ben shook his head at the utter innocence of the fellow.

"Listen, Harry," he almost pleaded. "Try to have a little sense, won't you? That business isn't worth anything. I gave it to you, didn't I? You couldn't borrow anything on that business of yours, Harry."

Ben tramped back and forth, rubbing one fist into the other palm, as was his way when he tackled a hard proposition. Now and then he halted to look at the letter again. On his fifth trip he stopped at his desk.

"Maybe I can get the bank to lend you the money," he said; "or fifteen thousand anyway, Harry. I'll take a second mortgage on your house for five thousand, to make up the twenty thousand. I do it because I believe in this Florida piece and in your house. They're both bargains. Wait a minute!"

Taking the receiver from his telephone, he called the bank and asked for Nat Parker. When his conversation was ended, he told Harry that they would go over to the bank and see Nat.

"He won't say yes or no to me," he told

Harry; "but he's interested, and he'll talk it over with us."

Nat, with his high forehead, was nothing but banker when they arrived. He had been thinking, he told them, and he wouldn't mind putting the matter of the loan up to the discount committee; but that committee would probably refer it to the full board, the amount being so large and the circumstances so peculiar.

"Your average balance doesn't justify any fifteen-thousand-dollar loan, Harry," he said, "or even a thousand-dollar loan; but you did have that five-thousand-dollar balance for a few days, and that shows you can get money once in awhile. The loan is suggested by Ben, and Ben is a director, and one of the directors we like to satisfy. We think a lot of Ben's judgment, and he says the property is worth a lot of money. We may be able to handle it this way—have the deed sent to us from Florida to be held in escrow until the loan is paid off; but I wouldn't even put it up to the board except for Ben."

He thought he meant it, too, but he was doing it for Happy Harry, just as every one did things for Happy Harry.

"You'd better let me handle it," he told Harry, and that gave him away, because that was what everybody thought and said to Harry.

Harry was so helpless—nothing but a big, good-natured boy. Every one had to help Harry, or where would Harry be?

IV

IN the event it proved that the board was willing to make the loan, but it came to that decision only after careful study of all the known facts, and upon Ben's guarantee that if the loan seemed apt to drag out too long he would insist that Harry should sell the property and not hold for a big profit. With both Ben and Nat in favor of the loan, it was granted.

Ben handled the details and bought the property for Harry. It began to look as if Harry would have enough money to justify him in marrying Bess, when, to Ben's bitter amazement, the big slump in Florida prices came.

The bank became uneasy at once, the loan was so large. Ben said he thought—he wouldn't guarantee, but he thought—he could get the money out of the property. He tried, and had fine letters from Florida, but no actual offers. The property

was worth the money, but no one was buying. It began to look as if the loan was one of those that would have to be nursed along for years; and then came the great tropical storm in Florida.

As soon as the wires were up, Ben wired to Florida to ask what damage had been done to his property. The reply said that a couple of hundred dollars would replace a toppled chimney and two overthrown trees, but that Happy Harry's property was ruined. It no longer existed, except as land under water. His bungalow had been flattened out at the first big blow, and the waves running into the canal had gnawed at his land, biting it away until it no longer existed. The canal had swallowed it.

"It can be refilled," said a letter that came later, "but it will cost a lot of money. You couldn't get anybody down here to give a thousand dollars for it. As a matter of fact, nobody would give five hundred, the way things are now."

As Ben read this letter, he heard Harry's loud laugh across the street and saw him slapping fat Sam Wilson on the back. Ben frowned. He had hoped the letter would bring better tidings than the telegram—first reports often being worse than the facts justified—and he had not bothered Harry with the news, but now he saw just where he and the bank stood. Happy Harry's house was mortgaged for its full value, and the note in the bank was worth little more than the paper on which it was written.

He went over to the bank and talked the situation over with Nat Parker.

"It's tough," Nat said. "You know how I hate this, Ben. The bank hasn't had a loss, except that hundred-dollar loan to Zermick, since I've been cashier, and here is fifteen thousand we practically forced down its throat, you and I. Harry hasn't got anything, has he?"

"He won't own his pants when this is cleared up," said Ben dryly. "He'll be a neat fifteen thousand in the hole."

"It's a shame," said Nat. "He's not half a bad fellow."

"I'm thinking of the bank," Ben said.

"So am I," said Parker. "Well, there it is, and I don't see what we can do about it. The bank will have to take the loss, and Harry will have to forget Bess and live the constricted life for five or ten years. You'll tell him now?"

"Of course I'll tell him!" declared Ben indignantly.

When he reached his office again, he telephoned across to Harry and told him to come over.

"Sure I will, Ben!" Harry answered gayly. "Only I've got to go out to Fifteenth Street and Willow to close up a five-thousand-dollar fire policy for Mrs. Megruie. I'll see you the minute I get back."

Before he returned, however, Nat Parker called up from the bank.

"That you, Ben?" he asked. "Listen, Ben—I've been talking to Will Wall and Mr. Hinch and the other officers about this Heathcote loan, and I've thought of something we might do about it. I'm calling a special board meeting for four o'clock this afternoon. Be sure to come over."

When Happy Harry came in to Ben's office, holding the screen door open while he threw a josh at some one outside, he was as jovial as ever.

"What's up, old gloom?" he asked cheerfully. "Anything gone wrong with my loan at the bank? Nat sent word I was to be there at four, and you look like the famous rose of summer that was the last."

"Harry," said Ben soberly, "it's all up with you, I guess. Read this telegram and this letter."

As Harry read them, he frowned and shook his head.

"Say, that's pretty rotten, ain't it?" he said, when he had put the two papers on Ben's desk. "What are you going to do about it, Ben?"

"What am I going to do? It's nothing for me to do. You owe the bank fifteen thousand you can't pay—that's all."

"By gollies, what a lot of money!" said Harry, grinning wryly. "Look here, Ben, there ought to be something a fellow can do. You ought to know about such things. I don't."

"You can go bankrupt, if that's what you mean," said Ben sourly; "but if you mean how you can save the bank its loss, I can't tell you. Nat Parker telephoned he might possibly have a way, but I can't see any."

"Try to think up one," said Harry. "You know about such things. I'll see you at the bank at four."

Ben watched him go out, and he shook his head. Then he laughed.

"And I thought I could help that fellow

make some money!" he said to himself. "He's a child—that's all he is, a mere child!"

V

THE members of the board of the Riverbank National were extremely somber as they sat in the board room at four o'clock that afternoon. Even Happy Harry saw it was no place to crack jokes in.

"If you will sit there, Mr. Heathcote," the president said. "I guess we all know why we are here. We have Mr. Heathcote's note for fifteen thousand dollars, plus interest to date, and his property seems to be wiped out. Mr. Parker has a suggestion to make, I believe."

"Yes, I have," said Parker. "It came to me after Mr. Farcome told me the circumstances to-day. What I have in mind is to save the bank the disgrace of having to charge fifteen thousand dollars to loss—a thing this bank has never yet had to do. We have been talking for six months or so of increasing the capital stock of the bank from two hundred thousand dollars to three hundred thousand dollars. We all feel it is desirable."

"We ought to do it," said Will Wall.

"Our stock is now quoted at about two hundred dollars a share, nominally, but none offered for sale," said Nat Parker. "I've been talking with George Gray, Mrs. Witherington's lawyer, this afternoon. Mrs. Witherington now owns half our shares, inherited from her husband's estate, but George says he does not advise her to take on any more. He thinks a hundred thousand dollars' worth is enough for a widow to own in one institution."

"And he's right," said Will Wall. "Tell them the rest of your idea, Nat."

"It is this," said Parker. "We'll increase our capital stock and offer a thousand new shares to the present stockholders at one hundred and twenty dollars a share, or some such price. I think almost every shareholder will want to take his allotment, but of course no one will be forced to. Instead, we can issue rights to each shareholder, entitling him to buy as many shares as he already owns."

"I own a hundred shares," explained Will Wall, "and I would get a warrant entitling me to subscribe for fifty of the new shares."

"That's it," said Parker. "If you don't want to buy the new shares, you can give

away your rights, or sell them for whatever you can get for them. I talked to George Gray about it to-day, and he said that Mrs. Witherington would not want to exercise her rights. He doubted if she would be able to sell them, and thought she would be willing to assign them to any one we designated. My suggestion is that we have a stockholders' meeting, vote to increase the capital, issue rights, and then have Mrs. Witherington assign hers to Harry Heathcote. I have been inquiring a little, and I believe that if Harry will canvass among people here in town he can sell five hundred of them and earn a snug little sum—probably several thousand dollars."

"It's worth trying," said Ben Farcome thoughtfully. "If Harry can average twenty dollars for his rights he'd have ten thousand dollars, and he could pay off most of his note."

"It's all Greek to me," said Happy Harry.

"You don't have anything to do with it," said Ben Farcome sourly. "If we get those rights for you, we'll hold them until we receive the money."

"You know more than I do about it, Ben," Harry said. "Anything you say."

The board thought the idea was a good one, and passed a resolution calling for the stockholders' meeting. In due time the stockholders met and voted the new issue of stock, to be sold at one hundred and twenty dollars a share, and the official authorities approved the plan. Happy Harry, meanwhile, went on selling insurance—fire, life, and automobile. It was not his trouble; Ben Farcome was taking care of it.

As soon as it became known in Riverbank that the bank was going to increase its capital stock, would-be purchasers began asking Nat Parker how they could get some of the new shares, and Nat put their names down in a register. It proved that Mrs. Witherington's lawyer had underestimated the demand for the stock. By the end of a week Nat had applications from outsiders for more than a thousand shares, and he began to be worried. The would-be purchasers were making his life a burden. Twenty dollars was only the beginning of the bids for rights, the offers went to thirty, to forty, and even to fifty dollars. Harry didn't have to do any canvassing; Ben Farcome and Nat Parker sold all his five hundred rights, and could have sold more.

When the thirtieth of the month arrived, and the rights had to be taken up and the shares paid for, the total sales for Harry Heathcote amounted to seventeen thousand nine hundred and seventy-five dollars. When his note was paid, together with the interest due, Ben Farcome handed him a check for two thousand four hundred and thirty-seven dollars and sixty-four cents.

Harry took the check, looked at the figures, and laughed.

"By gollies, that's great!" he said, and he slapped Ben on the back. "I knew you'd know how to handle it, Ben. I sure am much obliged."

"You ought to be," said Ben dryly. "You get out of a pretty deep hole, and you've made more than two thousand dollars clean profit for being a fat-headed baby! What are you going to do with that money?"

"I'm going to put it in the bank and go up and tell Bessie," Harry said. "And won't I have a good laugh at her? She's been worried. Ain't that the woman of it,

Ben? I told her you were fixing it all up for me."

"I mean," said Ben, "would you like to invest that couple of thousands?"

"Me? Pshaw, no, Ben!" laughed Happy Harry, throwing his head back and letting his laugh have a fair outing. "Me invest it? No—but, Ben, if you hear of any other chance to make a little money, let me know, will you?"

"For cat's sake!" exclaimed Ben Farcome with something like awe.

Presently, of course, the tale got around that Happy Harry Heathcote had walked right into the tents of the Philistines and spoiled them right up to the limit.

"Pretty slick!" people said of him. "Those bank fellows are about as slick as they make them, but Happy Harry went right into their nest and trimmed them to a stand-you-still!"

That's the way it goes—some reputations are made one way and some are made another, but when made they stick tighter than a wet leaf on a pane of glass.

THE SWING

WHEN I was a kid in my little home town,
Our yard had trees and grass galore,
But the place that was bare and always worn down,
Was under the swing by the old side door.

And the fun we had! Well, can't you see,
When most of the town came down to play?
We'd all take turns, you know how 'twould be,
And then we'd swing, and sweep, and sway.

'Way up we'd shoot, and down again,
And the air'd feel cool as it whizzed right by,
And sometimes we, like a bird a-wing,
Could see over the house, we went so high.

And then each kid when he'd had his turn,
Instead of lettin' the old cat die,
Would pump and work most hard and stern,
Until that swing would almost fly.

Then he'd get ready, as to the rear
The swing flew up, and started down,
A sittin' easy and loose, but here
He'd be tense, too, and maybe frown.

And just as the good old swing pulled in,
And started to take the grade on high,
He'd all let go, as if he'd been
A baseball batted up for a fly.

'Twas scads of fun! When we marked the line
To see who'd won, you know how 'twould be;
I'd always grin, 'cause every time
Nobody could jump as far as me!

The Winged Victor

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—IN THIS STORY OF HIGH ADVENTURE THE RACE IS LOGICALLY TO THE SWIFT OF THOUGHT AND THE BATTLE TO THE STRONG OF PURPOSE

By Gertrude Pahlow

ISABEL, breakfasting drowsily in bed, snuggled up against the pillows in a negligee as blue as her eyes, was startled from the lazy contemplation of her letters by a loud, peremptory knock on her door.

She jammed her spoon into her grapefruit, and a jet of juice squirted up, in its playful way, into her eye. The two shocks combined in her sleepy mind, and she instinctively dealt with the nearest one first; so that before she had finished wiping her eyes the knock sounded again, violently.

"Wh-who's there?" she faltered. There was no one in the house but the house-keeper and the servants, and with only that mouselike brood at home, a knock in such a manner meant a holdup at the very least.

"It's me. Let me in, will you?"

"Oh, Uncle Jim! Why, yes—if you don't mind the informality, come along." She gave her dark locks a pat and her blue draperies a twitch, as even the sleepiest young woman will do under the least coquettish circumstances, and straightened the silk coverlet.

The door opened, and a big, burly man of something past middle age came in. He was a trifle inclined to bogginess, both beneath the eyes and beneath the waistcoat, but his gray hair and mustache were well trimmed, and his gray glance was sharp and commanding.

"Morning, girly. Sorry to wake you up so soon."

"Oh, I was awake—only not entirely. But I thought you were miles from Washington."

"So I was, and I didn't come home in

such a hurry without a good reason, either. Last night, in New York, I ran into young Ronald Crewe."

Isabel blinked. The name stirred something in a far corner of her mind, but it was as distant and drowsy as a yawn in the next room but one.

"You'll have to tell the answer," she said. "My brain feels like an order of breakfast-food."

"Why, the mining engineer," said James Fanrell, with a touch of impatience, "the fellow who found the coal fields in Tacna-Arica."

Isabel's eyes brightened, and the sound of the name changed from a yawn to a clarion. "Oh, the one who was an ace in the war! The adventurer! Of course I know who he is; he's a hero."

James Fanrell frowned a little. "Never mind that stuff; we're not doing a movie scenario. Point is, he's a mining expert; he's been to South America on a job for the Government, investigating some vanadium beds, and he just got back."

"I ran into him in front of the Pennsylvania Station, and found he was rushing right from the boat to Washington. So I chucked everything and took the same train; and sure enough, the minute he arrived this morning he drove straight to the Bureau of Mines! You see?"

Isabel drank some coffee, in the hope that it would stimulate her brain. What she was expected to see was about as clear to her as the bottom of the Missouri River, and she was aware that patience was not her guardian's long suit. But the coffee brought no enlightenment, and she shook her head.

"Why, it's plain enough! A man doesn't rush to the end of his journey in such a sweat as that to report there's nothing doing, does he?"

"Oh, you mean he found lots and lots of vanadium? More than he expected?"

"Good gosh, what did the Lord give women brains for? I mean he found *less*, of course! He found the stuff in South America isn't worth as much as what we've got here—just what I've been told already—and he's rushing back to tell the Government to buy the Utah beds before I can. And that's where you come in."

Isabel pushed back her dark locks with a gesture of bewilderment. There must be something the matter with her besides sleepiness, she thought; she seemed to have missed one reel altogether.

"Where *I* come in!" she repeated. "You mean *me*?"

"Yes, I mean you. You know I've got an option on that property; I don't suppose you remember anything about it—you seem to have about as good a head for business as Clint—but I told you a month ago I was thinking of buying it if it was worth while."

"I'd about given up the idea, when I heard young Crewe was looking into it for the Government, and then I tightened up my claim. Now it's got to be done in a hurry; they'll send him out to secure it as soon as possible, and I've got to secure it a little sooner."

"I can't go myself; Clint's in Pennsylvania, and all the papers are here. So you'll have to go. The train leaves at nine o'clock—A.M."

"Good gracious!" Isabel looked at the little clock on the mantel, which had already ticked its way well past eight. "I've got to be on board a train for Utah in less than an hour?"

"You have; unless you want your guardian—and your fiancé, too—to lose a cool million. You'll do it for me, won't you, girly?"

"Of course, Uncle Jim. I—do you suppose Mr. Crewe will get that train?"

Jim Fanrell frowned again. "Not a chance. They'll keep him powwowing at the Bureau for an hour yet, getting his instructions."

"Look here, Isabel—don't you go getting notions into your little head about heroes and that kind of bunk. Your job now is to make a hero of Clint. He and

I both need you; I've told you that. And—I hope I won't have to remind your father's daughter that she owes a little something to me."

Isabel flushed, and straightened herself with an energetic movement.

"You won't, Uncle Jim. Trot along out of here, and send Mary to pack for me; and I'll go right away and get you yards and yards of the best vanadium, and a million dollars to boot."

Jim Fanrell's hard eyes grew kind, and he patted her warm shoulder. "That's the talk, my girly. You're a better man than my boy is. I'll have your papers and instructions all ready by the time you're dressed."

As the door closed behind him Isabel jumped out of bed, and into a swirl of pink silk garments. She was an efficient dresser; her toilette took place first in her mind and then on her person, and she was ready for the street as quickly as many a less enterprising lady could have been ready for bed.

But even as she jammed the trig little blue hat down over her wavy locks, the blue eyes that met hers in the glass grew dreamy.

"The fighter who saved more lives than he took," she said to herself. "The Knight-Aviator—I wonder what he looks like."

II

FOR all the speed and all the efficiency, Isabel caught the train by so fine a hair that the porter nearly got left outside the gate with her luggage.

Flung aboard like a last-minute bag of mail, she sat on her suitcase in the vestibule of the hindmost car, clutching the little hand bag that held the precious papers, and trying to capture breath enough to inquire for a seat of less precarious nature.

But before she could do so, even that which she had was suddenly taken from her, and both she and her suitcase were knocked galley-west by the impetuous irritation of an even later arrival.

This was a male person in a very great hurry. He swung himself up the steps after the train had started, burst through the door like a cannon ball and, tripping over the unexpected obstacle in the dark corridor, went down with it in an indiscriminate mélange of travelers and luggage, male and female.

For a moment there was no sound but that of bumps and gasps and odds and ends of speech like:

"What the devil—" "Oh, mercy—" "Damn this thing—" Then, gradually getting themselves and their impedimenta disentangled and up-ended, the two sat back on their heels and looked at each other in the dim light.

"I beg your pardon," said the male person earnestly. "I didn't think there'd be anybody here. I didn't look before I leaped. I do hope you aren't injured."

"N-not permanently, I think," answered Isabel rather coldly, being a good deal startled and shaken. "Do you always leap on board-a train like that?"

"Oh, no; if I have time to do the thing right, I run along the roofs and land on the cowcatcher," said the male person with a grin. "I say, I've busted something. I thought it was only my leg, but now I believe it's your umbrella. I'm awfully sorry."

There was something so boyish and warm about his voice that Isabel felt her natural displeasure waning. She did not enjoy being buffeted like a punching-bag, and the umbrella was a new one that she esteemed very highly; but the voice made her feel that there was something to be said on his side, that, after all, it couldn't be particularly pleasant to fall over an unexpected mound of girl and luggage when you thought yourself running down a clear field, or to break your leg over an umbrella, or have one broken over it.

The light was so dim, and the impact had mashed his hat so far down on his brow, that she could not get a clear impression of his face, but something told her that he was young and very nice. Growing suddenly aware of her undignified position, she began to struggle to her feet.

Seeing her movement, he jumped up first, took her hands, and pulled helpfully.

"I'm awfully sorry about the umbrella," he repeated earnestly, "and I'll make the most honorable amends I can, at the earliest opportunity. Is there anything I can do for you in the meantime?"

"I think not, thank you," answered Isabel discreetly. "I'm going to find the porter and see if I can get a Pullman section."

"Let me find him for you," he urged; and with the words he was off like a shot.

Isabel patted herself rapidly and effi-

ciently into order, reassembled her impedimenta, and stood waiting. She hoped heartily that the porter would bring a favorable report, for the accommodations of the corridor and the suitcase left much to be desired in the way of comfort.

But when he arrived, closely followed by her erstwhile assailant, it developed that his white coat clothed no messenger of good tidings.

"Ain' a single, solemitary berth lef' on dis whole train," he assured her sorrowfully. "Ain' room enough for a spare skeeter. How come you-all didn't make yo' preservations in time?"

"I didn't have time. Good gracious, do you mean to tell me I've got to stand in this corridor all the way to Chicago?"

"Oh, come, it can't be as bad as that!" interposed the young man. "There must be some spot, some thin lady who doesn't need all her space, or somebody who didn't show up. Think, captain."

As he spoke, he made a rapid gesture from his pocket to the porter's hand; and immediately there took place one of those reactions which psychologists call "Stimulus and Response." The porter ceased to be gloomy, and flashed the white teeth of optimism.

"Dey's a drawin'-room in dis car dat the folks what preserved it ain't turn up in it," he suggested, "an' you-all could set dere till de nex' station."

"Time we gets to Ha'isburg, somep'n' might happen; somebody might take sick or git lef' behine; or dem folks in de drawin'-room might be daid, an' den dey'd never show up at all."

"There is hope," agreed the young man. "Lead us to it, general."

The porter picked up the bags, and conducted them down the length of the car and into a cubicle screened from the public gaze by a green curtain. Here he bustled about like a kindly hostess, arranging the luggage, adjusting the window shade, producing a pillow for Isabel's back.

"Now you-all make yo'selves right to home," he adjured them from the door. "Ain' nobody goin' to 'sturve you fo' you gets to Baltimo' anyway. After dat we might all be daid." He dropped the curtain with a benedictory beam.

"He's a philosopher," remarked the young man. "And he's more; he's a heavenly ministrant. Imagine what luck, for me! I thought I'd do well if I could

get a place to stick on the roof, like a cinder; and then I got—this!"

His glance moved swiftly around the tiny, cozy inclosure, and came to rest, deferentially but with unmistakable delight, on Isabel; and she, on her side, could do no less than glance in return at this unexpected traveling companion, now seen clearly for the first time.

He was, as she had surmised, young, perhaps twenty-seven or twenty-eight; his hair and eyes were a warm red-brown, and he had a little clipped mustache of a darker shade; his chin was square and cleft, his mouth strong and mobile.

He looked faintly familiar to her; but that, she reflected with a touch of wistfulness, was perhaps because things that are pleasant to the eye often seem to suggest some forgotten, happy dream.

"It is luck to have a comfortable place to sit, even for a little while," she said. "I came in such a hurry that I didn't have time to wonder if I'd find one. I didn't know I was coming, an hour ago."

"I can beat that; I didn't know I was coming ten minutes ago. That is, I knew I was coming, but not on this train. Then somebody said, 'Of course you can't make the nine o'clock!' and I shot myself at it like a bolt from the blue, and landed on it like a bad penny. And here I am!"

He spoke in such a tone of exultant well-being that she could not forbear a little responsive smile. Indeed, she felt a pronounced sense of well-being herself.

The morning that streamed in through the window was golden with spring sunshine; the train drew smoothly and powerfully along its level bed; and, with all her hurry, she had thought to put on her severely, elegantly, Frenchly simple frock of navy-blue crépe, and the perfect little hat that matched it.

These circumstances were quite enough to account for an inward glow, without involving any other factors in the situation. Personal factors of course had no weight with her, anyway—an engaged girl, traveling on an important business errand. Her guardian needn't have reminded her of that.

III

THE young man however catching her smile, returned it with one of a definitely personal quality. His smile crinkled the corners of his red-brown eyes, and showed

teeth that were square, white and strong; it made his face very young and charming.

"There's nothing in the world so much fun," he said with a cozy air of imparting a confidence, "as to start on a journey, on an interesting errand, on a spring morning, with some one very nice to talk to. Lots of things are fun, but that's the most fun of all."

"You look as if you'd had a great deal of fun," remarked Isabel rather enviously.

"Oh, I have. Heaps. Haven't you?"

"Not so very much. I've had a—a queerish sort of life. I've been rather lonely."

"That's a shame. None but lively things ought to have happened to you."

This was certainly a rather pronounced opinion for so impersonal a relationship, of so short standing; and Isabel felt that she ought to greet it with a frown, or at least with visible coldness. She turned more fully toward the young man to do so.

But he was looking at her so boyishly, so respectfully, with a look of candor so charming and so disarming, that she couldn't manage it; the most she could do was to color a little and look out of the window.

"The spring's very early this year," she said, changing the subject respectfully.

"I suppose it is. I've just come from the tropics, and things look sort of sparse and bare to me here."

"Oh, the tropics!" Isabel couldn't forbear turning to him again, with brightening eyes. "I've always wanted to go to the tropics. Is it wonderful there?"

"Gorgeous, if you don't have to stay. Green, rich, luscious—no, lush, that's the word; luscious, too, if you think of those big oozy pineapples and mangoes. But it's no place to stay."

"Too treacherous?"

"Yes; and too debilitating. I don't like to spend half my time in a hammock. I like to be up and gyrating around, energetically. I like to work."

"Oh, so do I! I mean I would if I could; but I never can get a chance."

"Why should you? People like you ought not to work. The Government, or the Carnegie Institute, or something ought to subsidize you just to stay around and beautify the earth."

This point of view stirred Isabel to indignation. A spark lighted in her blue eyes, and the color rose in her cheeks.

"Nonsense!" she said warmly. "What do looks have to do with it?"

"Why, they're a career in themselves—beautiful looks, I mean. Rossetti or one of those chaps said 'Beauty like hers is genius,' and he meant that if you're lovely to look at you don't need any other kind of job."

"That's perfectly ridiculous. Do *you* think you don't have to work, simply because you're good-looking?"

"Oh, that's different. A man doesn't bother about those things."

"Then why should a woman? Do you think women aren't as intelligent, or as energetic, or as much bound to pull their weight in the boat as *men*?"

This started them off on a brisk discussion, which lasted all the way to Baltimore, and which absorbed them so completely that they never noticed the stopping of the train, the bustle of the station, or the commotion of starting again.

It was only when the porter stuck his head between the curtains with a grin of greeting that they came back to their surroundings.

"Well, Ol' Lady Luck on yo' side, sure 'nough!" remarked the porter, beaming paternally. "Dem folks dat owns dis compartment done turn up missin' again."

"Train don't stop now till we gets plumb to Ha'isburg; I done 'spain to de conductor, an' dey ain' nobody goin' to shoo you out for fo' hours anyway." His teeth beaioned another benediction as he withdrew.

Isabel and the young man looked at each other and, drawn into comradeship by the warmth of their debate, burst out laughing.

"Well!" said he. "We seem to be like the man who came to the party, and ate just as hearty as if he'd been really invited. Talk about luck!"

"It depends on what you call luck, doesn't it? Some people might not think it very lucky to be shut up for four mortal hours in violent disagreement."

"Oh, I don't know about the violent disagreement. I was just talking for the fun of it. As a matter of fact, I think you're entirely right; I'm strong for women having a place in the sun; but you do it so awfully well, and it's such a satisfaction to talk with a girl who can discuss without arguing, that I hated to stop."

Isabel glowed; like most young women who are accustomed to being beautiful, she

valued a tribute to her intellect much more than one to her physical perfections. She gave him a smile of appreciation, and his warm, swift smile flashed back at her.

Since the interruption the atmosphere of the little inclosed space had changed; they had ceased to be casual acquaintances brought together by a bump, and had become friends.

"It's time for introductions," said the young man, feeling the change as sensitively as she had done. "I'll begin. My name's—"

But Isabel stopped him with a quick gesture. Some instinct told her to avoid the definiteness of names and statistics; this meeting was, to her, a delightful break in the commonplace, a moment snatched from the Never-Never-Land, and to bring it into line with everyday realities would steal away its enchantment. She did not want to think of her own realities just now; time enough for that later.

"Let's not," she said. "Let's not bother with labels. It's nicer like this; and it's only for a little while."

"Why only a little while?" he asked rebelliously.

"Why, Harrisburg's not so very far away."

"Harrisburg's not the last known limit of the wide world. There are more places, and more time, after we leave Harrisburg."

"Yes, but—let's not bother with them now. Now is rather nice, just by itself, isn't it?"

She looked at him pleadingly, and his sensitive face warmed in response. It was evident that it was not difficult for him to agree with her on any subject.

"Yes, now is very, very nice," he acquiesced. "All right, we'll let it go on being now for awhile. And to-morrow we probably—"

She would not consider to-morrow; let to-morrow take care of itself. The charming present was like a masked ball; an interlude in the commonplace, two people insulated in anonymity, strangers to each other, and yet infolded in intimacy. They had no yesterday, and no to-morrow; they had no world outside this little inclosed room where they were all alone.

All at once they plunged into confidential comradeship. They told each other about their tastes and preferences; they recalled high spots of experience, few for Isabel, many for him; they talked about

music and makes of cars and things they meant to do.

By and by they were hungry, and went out and lunched together and, drawn oddly closer by the trivial act, returned to their cubicle even better friends than they had been before.

When the train had passed Harrisburg and the compartment still remained unclaimed, and they had read and talked through the afternoon, and dined together, another change took place in their relationship.

In sensibly but surely they slipped from friendship into a warmth and depth of intimacy. The shadows thickened, the rumble of the wheels swung into a soothing rhythm; Isabel had taken off her hat and rested her head against the back of the seat, where the dark waves of her hair framed her face softly; the young man had left his place by the window opposite her, and come to her side to share a magazine with her, and somehow they had drifted into talk of poetry.

The young man, for all his energy and his variety of experience, was, it seemed, a lover of the art, and had much lore of it. He quoted to her, in a low voice very sympathetic to her ear, lovely lines unknown to her:

"Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams."

He started to explain that he quoted them to show how cleverly the effect of rhyme was obtained by mere repetition, but suddenly—with a gesture that renounced insincerity—broke off the explanation. A silence fell. The wheels rumbled quietly. In the little room it was warm and still.

"The blue and the dim and the dark cloths," he repeated softly, after awhile. "That's like you, the way you look now—blue eyes, dark hair, all folded in the dim twilight, 'night and light and the half light.' You're like the heavens' embroidered cloths yourself."

"What a lovely thing to say," murmured Isabel.

"I have spread my dreams under your feet," said he, very low. "Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams."

"Pittsburgh!" called a voice somewhere

near them, striking sharply into their silence; and the train jolted to a stop.

"Well, well!" exclaimed their friend the porter, pushing open the curtains with his cheery countenance. "Here we is, plumb to Pittsburgh, an' nobody ain't puttin' in no claim-ticket for yo' room! Look like you-all kin have it clear up to Chicago. You lemme know when you wants it made up."

Isabel started up, her cheeks flaming crimson. "Oh!" she cried. "We don't want it at all! We're not traveling together!"

"You ain't!" returned the porter, with round eyes of astonishment. "Why, I thought you was a bride-'n'-groomal couple!"

Isabel gasped, and the young man, himself very flushed, stepped quickly into the breach. "Of course not," he said. "We've just—just been chatting together. The compartment is the young lady's; I have nothing to do with it."

"I'll tell the world you haven't!" ejaculated an angry voice; and all three, starting, turned to look at a thick-set young man who was shouldering the porter out of the aperture. "That young lady happens to be my fiancée, and I'll thank you to explain what you're doin' in her state-room!"

"Why—Clinton!" gasped Isabel.

IV

If the little room had been under a spell of enchantment throughout the long, swift day, there was no doubt that it had opened its curtained door to reality now. It was full of voices, of confusion, of tension, and anger, and dismay.

"What the devil does this mean?" demanded Clinton Fanrell, turning on Isabel. "What you doin' here, eh?"

"I think I might ask you that," retorted Isabel, considerably disconcerted, but herself hot with anger at his tone. "I'm doing your father's errand. What about you?"

"I'm lookin' after my father's future daughter-in-law; and by George, it's high time too! Gad, when I called up this mornin', and found you were on this train and I could meet you, I was as pleased as a kid; and now I get here and find you travelin' in a stateroom with this guy! What's the big idea? Are you tryin' to put somethin' over on me?"

"Wait a minute," interrupted the young man of the day's adventure. He spoke very quietly and coldly, but his eyes were blazing. "If you say anything more, you're likely to say something that I can't overlook, either on this lady's account or my own.

"Our being together is an accident; we both caught the train at the last minute, when the seats were all gone, and if the porter hadn't been able to oblige us with this drawing-room we'd have stood up all day. That's all there is to it. Any more insinuations from you, and I'll demand an apology to us both."

Clinton Fanrell subsided into angry but shamefaced mutterings, and the porter interposed with the ready tact of his race.

"Yassir, yassir, dat's de Lawd's troof. Drawin'-room done been took straight to Chicago; folks done pay fo' it an' never show up, an' I done give it to dis pretty lady an' gemman myself. You want me to make it up fo' *you* now, 'stead o' dis gemman?"

At this suggestion Isabel's color flamed up again hotly. "No, no!" she exclaimed. "Neither of them, porter! I'll have to have the drawing-room to myself."

"Cain't do dat, miss, noways. De onliest spare spot dey is is one lady dat got off at Pittsburgh. Dat makes one berth out yonder in de car, an' two here, fo' you three folks."

"Let this other gentleman," said the young man, magnificently contemptuous, "have the berth in the car, and give the compartment to the young lady, and I'll sit in the smoking room."

"Oh, but that won't do at all!" protested Isabel quickly. "Of course, the obvious thing is for me to take the single berth, and you two men to stay here. I'm going to do it right away. Good night."

In spite of their protests, she left them forthwith, hot and cold, ashamed and proud. The porter, who was evidently deeply concerned with her welfare, followed at once to make up her bed; and she withdrew to its constricted privacy, and had no more speech of any one that night.

She had no more speech of any one that night; but thoughts she had, many of them. She thought of Clinton Fanrell, and of how unpleasantly red and raucous he was when he was angry; and then she thought—for she was a just young woman—that he had had cause for anger, and that

she should not be the one to censure his redness.

She turned her mind away from him, as it had long been her habit to do when he exhibited unpleasing symptoms, and tried to think of her errand. Perhaps she could delegate it to Clinton, now that he had appeared.

But somehow she didn't want to do that; when she had undertaken a thing, she liked to see it through. She had come a long way with it already. Only it didn't seem very long.

What a pleasant way to travel, in a little quiet room— How nice red-brown hair is, and bright brown eyes that crinkle at the corners. How nice for a virile young man to know poetry, to say it in a warm, vibrant voice, rather close to the ear—"I have spread my dreams under your feet; tread softly, because you tread on my dreams—"

In the morning, Clinton was striding along the aisle, clamoring for her to come to breakfast, before she was dressed. He waited, impatiently, in the smoking room, and as soon as she passed the door he jumped out at her like a gigantic jack-in-the-box.

Isabel was inclined to be stand-offish, for though she realized that his conduct of last night had not been without justification, she felt that he had been rather more unpleasant than was necessary.

But he was full of excitement and enthusiasm and, as usual when his own mood pleased him, he paid no attention to hers. He took her tightly by the arm.

"Come on into the dinin' car, Isabel!" he said in her ear. "I've got somethin' to tell you!"

Isabel went passively. She was always passive with Clinton; somehow, when she was with him, she seemed not wholly present. Her long habit of obedience to his father had made her accept him as part of her life; but when she was obeying Uncle Jim the whole of herself was not there, either.

When they were seated at the little table, and the waiter had brushed the cinders from the white linen and gone away with an order which filled nearly the whole blank, Clinton leaned toward her, his heavy face eager and excited.

"D'you know who that guy is?" he demanded.

Isabel did not pretend to misunder-

stand him; she too—by a coincidence—was thinking of the same guy.

"No. He didn't tell me his name," she said.

"Well, he didn't tell me either; but I found it out just the same. He's Ronald Crewe, that's who he is. Can you beat that?"

V

ISABEL opened her eyes wide in polite surprise, but within herself she was not astonished. His faint look of familiarity, which probably meant that she had seen his picture somewhere—his adventurous life, glimpsed in his snapshots of the tropics, and the antipodes, and the war—the fact that he had caught that particular train in that particular hurry, had all foreshadowed this information. Perhaps it was because she had surmised who he was that she had been so determined not to know.

"How did you find out?" she asked.

"Why, his bag was standin' open, and I saw it on a letter. Smart, eh? You know what it means, don't you—his bein' here?"

"I suppose so. He's on his way out to get that vanadium property for the Government."

"Sh! Don't say it so loud! Yes, that's it; and of course our game is to beat him. He don't know who you are, does he?"

"He hasn't the least idea."

"Right; and you bet I took mighty good care he shouldn't see *my* name on any of my stuff. I've got a little more sense than he has, luckily. Well, now, our game is to keep right on knowin' all about him and not lettin' him know anythin' about us; and that's where you come in."

Isabel looked at him coldly.

"That's exactly the phrase your father used when he sent me out on this errand. I seem to be always coming in as a useful adjunct to your family's plans."

"Of course, honey, you're the most valuable adjunct we've got, the old man and I. You aren't sore, honey, are you? I know I was a little sour last night, but I didn't mean anythin'. You know that." He reached across the table to lay his thick hand, with a heavy pressure, on hers.

Isabel drew her hand away unostentatiously. "No, I'm not sore. How do I come in now? What is it you want me to do?"

"Why, I want you to get friendly with

this bird, and find out his plans. He don't have a word to say to me; I sort o' think he don't like me, somehow. But of course anybody'd like you, you're such a peach of a looker. You get next to him, and get the real dope, see?"

"What do you want of it?"

"Oh, be yourself, Isabel! It 'll make all the difference to us. If he's wise to dad's option, he'll break a bone to get there first; and he knows that country, he's one up on us at the start.

"But if he don't know anybody else is after it, we can beat him a lot easier; he won't be in any great rush, and we'll jump to the quick connections at Chi and at Denver. Your job is to get his confidence, and then give me the low-down so we can act accordin'."

"I don't like it, Clinton. It seems like spy's work. Can't you do it yourself, if you must have it done?"

"Don't be foolish; I told you he won't talk to me. Nobody can get it but you. Why not? What are you fussin' about?"

"It seems like using his confidence—if he gives it—to our advantage."

"Well, whose advantage *would* you use it to, his? I tell you, kid, there's a million dollars involved in this deal—a million for the old man, and that means a million for you and me. Maybe you don't realize that."

"There are other things in the world besides money, Clint."

"There are pretty dog-goned few things as important. If you have it in your power to help get a million berries for my dad, and don't do it, you're a traitor. It's your duty to me, in the front place—and what about your duty to him, for all he did for your old man? Have you forgotten that?"

Isabel hadn't forgotten; she had never had an opportunity to. She sat silent and, the lavish breakfast now arriving, she prodded moodily at her cereal to keep her hand out of Clinton's reach.

She had never realized, before, how long and how heavily this burden of obligation to her guardian had sat upon her shoulders. Uncle Jim had eased it by unfailing indulgence, and she had been too genuinely grateful to mind it very much; but Clinton's heavy hand laid on top of it increased its weight intolerably.

Clinton looked at her anxiously, disturbed by her silence.

"It isn't as if I was askin' you to do

anythin' crooked, honey," he coaxed. "It's just to talk with him a little; and he wouldn't be so bad to talk to, for a little while, I should think; he's quite a decent lookin' guy.

"What would you be doin' to him? Just givin' him the pleasure of lookin' at the prettiest girl on the train. And what would you be doin' for yourself? Helpin' get a million bones for your boy friend, an' payin' back some of what the old man did for you. Oh, go on, honey; say you will."

Isabel still sat silent and uncertain. She wanted to do her duty to her guardian, of course; but she didn't want to act the spy toward the red-brown young man. And yet she wanted—she certainly did want—to talk to him again. She thought of yesterday, that had flown so fast in the little sunny room.

"Mo'nin', miss! 'Scusin' de liberty of interruptin' yo' breakfas'," said a cheerful voice at her shoulder.

Isabel turned to encounter the beaming smile of that sincere well-wisher, her porter. She smiled in ready response.

"'Scusin' de liberty," repeated the Chesterfield of the whisk broom, "but de gemman—dat gemman you was talkin' wid a little while yest'dy—he say de drawin'-room at yo' disposure, miss.

"He done roust me out from all my odder work to do it up special, so's it'd be ready fo' you time you finish breakfas'. He say tell you it's empty, swep' an' varnish' fo' you."

"Why, that's very kind of him," answered Isabel, doubtfully. Her heart warmed at the thought of the little friendly room, but she wondered if she ought to accept the sacrifice of it; and, empty, it seemed to have lost some of its charm.

Clinton however interposed and settled the matter for her.

"That's all right, George," he said briskly. "You go tell him the young lady accepts, with pleasure, if he'll sit there with her. Tell him just that, now."

And as the porter went off, beaming, he added to her in a tone of high satisfaction: "There's your chance done up in silk, baby! Go on, to please me. Don't fuss any more, that's a good baby; just hop right to it."

This seemed to leave Isabel no choice at all. Brightening—of course, as she told herself, only with the relief of having the thing settled without any more squabbling

—she ate her breakfast with appetite, and obeyed her fiance's urging to "step on the gas." In ten minutes she was back in the familiar car.

VI

THE compartment was bright with morning sunshine again, as it had been yesterday, when she peeped in; and there sat the young man, an open book on his knee.

He was not reading however, only looking out of the window; and apparently he was very much on the alert, for he sprang to his feet and came to the door the instant her light tap touched the framework.

"You did come!" he exclaimed joyfully. "I was afraid you wouldn't. Good morning."

"I wanted to," she answered shyly. "Good morning to you."

"Did you really want to?" he asked with his boyish eagerness. "That's sweet of you. Sit here, where you did yesterday. I—it was a wonderful day, yesterday. I thought about it all night."

Isabel opened her lips to say that she also had thought about it all night, but decided that that was saying rather too big a mouthful, and closed them again. A little silence fell. She took her seat by the window, and he the one opposite it.

"You know," he said, after a pause, not looking at her, "a chap like me, that knocks around from pillar to post, here to-day and in Mars to-morrow, you know he's an awfully lonely sort of chap."

The wistfulness in his dark eyes, like a lost little boy's, knocked at Isabel's heart; but she made an effort to answer impersonally. "I should imagine any one living like that would make loads of friends."

"Oh, you make friends enough. And then leave them. It seems to me all my life is made up of finding lovely people, and losing them again. I never realized it so much as I do to-day."

Again Isabel restrained the answer on her tongue's end, though it wanted very much to be said. The train chugged smoothly on, over the level Illinois farmland fresh with spring green.

"Well, anyway," said he, breaking the silence again, "it's certainly time now for introductions. My name's Ronald Crewe."

"And mine's Isabel Lee. I've heard of you, first during the war, and off and on ever since. I—I always thought you were a wonderful person."

He flushed, partly with depreciation, and partly with pleasure. "Oh, that's rubbish. They talked an awful lot of bunk during the war. I never did anything that every one else didn't do."

"It's no use your telling me that. Do you think I don't know why you got the Croix de Guerre, and the Congressional Medal? Do you think I never heard about that time you rescued the—"

"Oh, don't, please don't! Half of that stuff was pure accident, and the rest was newspaper hot air—Tell me something about you. Your name's beautiful; it sounds like you. Where do you live?"

"Well, now I live in Washington, with my guardian. But until two years ago, when my father died, I lived—pretty nearly everywhere. I've never lived anywhere, much."

"Neither have I; I've been an orphan ever since I was a pup, and rolled around the globe gathering no moss. But you—you look as if you'd always lived in a white house with pillars and a deep garden, and hollyhocks across the front. I'd never think of you as a wanderer."

"Do I look so mossgrown?"

"No, no; but you look so—so finished and gracious, so rooted to a lovely life."

"You say things charmingly. You sound more like a poet than an aviator."

"Every aviator's half a poet; if you have any poetry in you, flying'll bring it out. Are you going on a long journey now?"

"To Utah. Are you—" She broke off; this sounded too much like Clinton's questionnaire.

"Really? What luck! I'm going out that way, too. Only I have to branch off before I get to Colorado, for a jaunt into Missouri. How are you going?"

"To Denver, first."

"Oh, I wish I could catch up with you there! I have to do a couple of jobs in rather a hurry, but after that my time's my own. Where are you going to stay?"

"I—I hardly know; I'm going into the country. But—but—" She broke off, uneasily and unhappily.

There was another pause, a constrained and distressed one, with something quivering in it.

"I know there's a but," said Ronald Crewe at last. "I heard that chap last night. No use in my dodging it. Tell me—is it true you're engaged to him?"

Isabel nodded, and the hot color mounted from her chin to her forehead. She could not speak. It was very odd; it was almost as if she disliked to admit that she was engaged to Clinton.

"But how—how—why in the world—Forgive me; I know I haven't any business to say that. And the Lord knows, anybody who's knocked around as much as I have ought not to be surprised at anything."

He spoke indifferently, to show that her engagements, few or many, were no affair of his; and very bitterly.

Isabel tried hard to think of something to say that should be soothing, non-committal, and tactful, but to save her life she could discover nothing.

She was aware of a strong and completely irrational desire to cry. She bit her lip and looked out of the window; Ronald Crewe bit his lip and stared moodily at the floor; and nobody said anything.

Suddenly the heavy silence was shattered by a brisk interruption.

"Hi there, you people!" exclaimed Clinton noisily, in the doorway. "Have you gone to sleep? D'you know we're only five minutes from Chi?"

The broken silence flew about in sharp splinters, like shrapnel, stunning and wounding. Neither of the two in the compartment could find their tongues or look at each other. They found their feet instead, and hustled about, hunting up their possessions, letting activity take the place of speech.

Clinton talked for all three, exuding statistics about the speed of the run, and the degree of lateness; he was in excellent spirits.

"Lost two minutes and a half in a twenty-four hours' run!" he exulted. "How's that for goin'? Can't beat this little old railroad when she spreads herself, hey? Holy mackerel, Isabel, how many bags you got? Everythin' collected, George? Well, Mr.—er—here's where we say good-by. Thank you for your politeness to my fiancée."

Ronald Crewe still did not speak; but he turned to Isabel and held out his hand, and she put hers in it. Their fingers clasped closely.

"Chicago!" called a voice in the vestibule.

"Here we is, boss," said the friendly porter. "I'll dump all yo' impediments on de

platfo'm, where you'll lan' right on top o' 'em."

Clinton seized Isabel by the arm which held the valuable little black bag, and propelled her hurriedly out of the car and down the steps.

"What 'd he say?" he demanded in her ear.

"He's going our way, but he has to go to some place in Nebraska first."

"Hurray! Then we've got the jump on him. There's a train for Denver in twenty minutes, from the other station; we can just make it if we hustle. That bird won't have the ghost of a show."

"But—"

"Don't waste any breath talkin'; you need it to run for a taxi. Porter! Porter!"

At breakneck speed they dashed through the station in the wake of their fleeing luggage, flung themselves into a cab, shot through the streets with true Chicago *élan*, and dashed into the other station.

Here they were delayed at the ticket office, Clinton fuming, shifting from one foot to the other, and swearing under his breath, for what seemed a very long time, but was probably three or four minutes; and at last rushed on triumphant with the long pale-green strips, waved them in the face of the gateman, and scrambled aboard the train.

"Whew!" whistled Clinton. "That was some sprint! Sit down anywhere, Isabel, till I can get George to fix us up. Any-way, you won't have to depend on Mr. Ronald Crewe for a seat to-day."

Isabel said nothing, but, dropping into a vacant seat, looked out of the window and thought of the little drawing-room.

"We've seen the last we're ever goin' to see of *that* bird," added Clinton with satisfaction.

Isabel still made no answer, but she gave a very slight start. She had just seen, among the moving figures on the platform, a brown suit inclosing a lithe, muscular figure, and a pair of red-brown eyes looking straight at her.

VII

THIS time there was no difficulty about accommodations; Clinton secured two sections, in two adjoining cars, without delay. Having deposited his belongings in his own, he took a seat opposite her.

"Well, by gravy, you can't beat us!" he exulted. "Some train catchers, eh?

Lucky I came along; you'd never have made this one by yourself, Isabel."

"I made yesterday's at a pretty good rate of speed," Isabel reminded him.

"Oh, well, you had the old man to shove you. Women never can catch a train in a hurry, alone. Well, now we don't have anythin' on our minds but our hair. Pretty slick, the way we got ahead o' that bird, eh?"

"He wasn't racing."

"No, by jingo, he wasn't; and that's where our smartness comes in. If we'd been simple enough to give away our game, the way he did, he'd have been racin' all right. I have to hand it to you, honey; you got that out of him just as neat as a pick-pocket."

The simile offended Isabel; in truth, that was what she felt like.

"I didn't really get it out of him at all," she protested. "He just told me."

"That's what I mean. You got it out of him without his knowin'; that's where the smartness comes in. You'd make a nifty little confidence girl."

"Please, Clinton, don't talk like that. He was very courteous to me, and I'd hate to repay him by trickery. When do we get to Denver?"

"Late to-morrow night. Oh say, did dad tell you when the option expires?"

"Yes, May first."

"Good; that's Friday, and this is only Tuesday; that gives us plenty of time, even if the train's late. We'll spend what's left of to-morrow night in Denver, and start out on the job early in the mornin'.

"I have to laugh when I think of that Crewe bird, and the way he's goin' to get stung. Guess I'll call him the Crow bird; he sure is one unlucky fowl!" He chuckled heartily at his wit.

The day dragged on slowly—different, so different from yesterday. It seemed strange that one had ever thought train travel swift and stimulating.

Acres and acres of new corn—miles and miles of prairie grass, how drearily monotonous, how unlike the—well, one couldn't say exactly what the vegetation had been that bordered the railroad yesterday, but anyhow it had been beautiful.

Isabel tried to read; the magazines seemed vapid and silly, the newspapers were dull. Clinton dozed; his mouth fell open, and he snored slightly.

They had traveled a long day and a

long night, and it began to seem as if nothing would ever happen again; there was nothing left to read, nothing left to talk about; Isabel sat looking out of the window, where the interminable prairies stretched out into an endless world of monotony, and Clinton, reduced to doing the cross-word puzzle on the back of one of yesterday's papers, was tapping his teeth with a pencil, and trying to think of a five-letter word that he had never known—when suddenly there came a jolt, followed by a rending crash.

The car gave a rush forward, then a bucking backward movement, and then, quite deliberately and with a certain dignity, settled over on its side. Suitcases began to fall heavily all around, like ripe fruit in autumn.

Isabel and Clinton, righting themselves with a struggle, sat on the framework of the window with their feet on the plate glass, and stared at one another.

Isabel's only feeling was one of extreme surprise; was this the way, her "unconscious" asked her, one traveled in search of vanadium? But when she saw the expression of injury, amounting almost to insult, on Clinton's pudgy face, she burst out laughing.

"What's the idea?" inquired Clinton in an aggrieved tone, blinking. "What'd they do that for, eh?" And, perceiving Isabel's mirth, he added indignantly. "Think you're funny, what?"

"I di-didn't do it!" giggled Isabel. "And I promise not to do it again!"

"Well, who did do it?" demanded Clinton severely.

"Perhaps it's an earthquake. Or perhaps the engineer's studying aesthetic dancing. I never saw a train so temperamental before."

The other passengers were now recovering their voices, and a babel of exclamations burst forth. Some had had hand bags fall on them, and were greatly astonished; others had provided a resting place for passengers formerly seated opposite them, and were recovering their breath with gasps and grunts.

A woman was calling, in a high, hysterical voice, "Wilhee! Wil-lee, come here! Wil-lee, come *here*, I tell you!" And after a time Willie was heard to squeal, in a suppressed fashion, "I c-can't, ma! You're s-sittin' on me!"

Presently some one opened the car door

from the outside, and called in, "It's all right! No danger at all!" in a reassuring official voice.

Encouraged by this news, Isabel, tightly clutching the little black bag, which had not left her hand even during the chute, crawled on her hands and knees through the dislocated passage, and climbed out onto the ground.

People were crawling out from other cars and collecting into a small crowd; everybody was greatly excited, everybody talking at once; the brakeman who had been sent along the train with reassurance was trying to explain, and the passengers were firing questions at him so hard that he got no chance.

At length the heaven-born leader who always asserts himself in every crowd lifted up his voice in a powerful roar.

"Everybody keep quiet, and let the feller tell what happened! Stand back, and give him air!"

The brakeman, given an opportunity, told his tale in a few words which constituted a model of reporting. "It's like this. The spring rains has been comin' down from the hills, see?"

"An' the bank sort o' loosened up, like, underneath a trestle, just ahead there; an' when the engine struck it the support give way, see? An' the track busted, an' a little more an' we'd all a' went over."

"But the engineer an' the fireman, they was right on the job, an' they got back an' uncoupled the engine in time. An' so we're all here, an' no damage but a few bruises."

There was a chorus of excited ejaculations. Everybody had an opinion to express, and expressed it freely; people who had been total strangers five minutes ago were now intimates, and people who had been bored to tears were all animation.

Reports flew about of passengers who had been stunned, and other passengers who had been cut by broken glass, and these bits of news added a pleasurable zest to the conversation. Some one started a purse for the engineer, and another—slightly smaller—for the fireman.

This pleasing state of things lasted for some minutes, until every one had had a chance to express himself, and first aid had been offered to all those passengers who could be prevailed upon to endure it, and the engineer and fireman had received their meed of appreciation.

Then some one thought to express a

belated concern for the engine; and then it developed that, humanly speaking, the engine was no more.

True to the most heroic tradition of locomotives, it had plunged into the abyss, and given its life for its train.

When this realization seeped through the crowd, a new clamor arose, of a less altruistic nature. They began to inquire about localities and distances, and to discover that they were miles from a town or another locomotive, faced by a choice between walking fifty miles over uncharted country, jumping across a damaged abyss, and staying where they were. The sound now was one of lamentation and disconcertment.

"By gosh!" ejaculated Clinton, who had emerged when he found that nearly every one else had done so without damage, and now stood, with Isabel and the rest of the crowd, contemplating the wrecked trestle and the prostrate engine. "How long does that mean we've got to stick around this dump?"

"A darned long time, I imagine," said one of the men. "First they've got to get an engine to haul us out of this, and then they've got to mend the trestle to haul us over."

"But, good Lord, that'll take hours—maybe days! And I've got to be in Denver to-night!"

"So have some of the rest of us," commented his neighbor dryly.

"But I've got to!" insisted Clinton. "It's a matter of—of a pile of money!"

"If it was a matter of life and death," returned the other, "it wouldn't make any difference. You better be thankful it's only coin."

"Only coin!" snorted Clinton indignantly. "I'm goin' to see the engineer."

VIII

BUT the engineer, on being interviewed, proved shockingly callous. Having just been through an experience involving the risk of several hundred lives, including his own, his sense of proportion had perhaps suffered; at all events he conveyed the impression that Clinton's entire fortune might follow the engine into the abyss without drawing a tear from him.

"But you don't know who I am!" protested Clinton. "My old man's James J. Fanrell!"

"Is that so?" returned the engineer with

notable calmness. "If he was James J. Napoleon, I'd give you just the same advice I do now; keep your shirt on."

"But I tell you," insisted Clinton vehemently, "I've got to get away from here!"

"Help yourself, buddy," said the engineer generously. "If you want to h'ist old 1021 out o' that hole and run her yourself, you're plenty welcome to."

There seemed little that even a Fanrell could do about a situation as unreasonable as this and, muttering and red with anger, he rejoined Isabel.

She had long since formed a habit of appearing not to know him when he was in one of his irate, corrective moods; and now she was sitting on a suitcase retrieved from the interior, devoting herself to cheering and distracting that Willie who had supported his mother during the crisis, and who still appeared depressed by the experience.

"So Robin Hood captured the bad sheriff," she was saying, "and tied him up tight—"

"Did he kill him?" interrupted Willie, brightening.

"No, he just made him a prisoner. And Little John captured the captain of the guard—"

"Kill him?" asked Willie hopefully.

"Oh, no, they never killed people if they could help it. And Friar Tuck—"

"Isabel!" interrupted Clinton brusquely. "Come here!"

"I can't just now, Clinton; I'm busy—And the monk captured the head steward."

"Did he do any tricks?" demanded Willie, hopefully.

"Who?"

"The monkey."

"No, he wasn't that kind of monk; he was a man, with his head shaved, and—"

"What'd he have his head shaved for? Fleas?"

"Oh, no. It was the custom for people who meant to live a holy life, because—"

"Isabel!" insisted Clinton angrily. "Put down that blamed kid, and come here!"

People hearing his command turned in surprise to look at him; and Isabel, her color rising warmly, excused herself to Willie, and moved away to a little distance. Clinton followed her, glowering.

"I don't know why you can't come when I call you," he growled.

"I don't know what right you have to speak to me like that," answered Isabel, flashing. "Am I your slave?"

"You're my fiancée."

"Apparently you think they're the same thing."

"Oh, be your age. A man can't be expected to hang on to his company manners when everythin's goin' wrong. That damned engineer says he can't do a thing to get us out of here."

"We knew that already, didn't we?"

"I didn't; I thought there'd be somebody around the place who had pep enough to do somethin'."

"What can any one do? They sent somebody off to telegraph the minute we got on our feet. Now we just have to wait."

"Well, I must say, you take it pretty easy. Anybody'd think you didn't care a rap whether we made that million or not."

"I don't happen to care enough to swear about it—I don't care enough to lose my temper, either."

"I suppose it's nothin' to you, seein' you're sure of your graft anyway. Of course, that's natural—like father, like child."

Isabel's eyes flashed in a manner that belied her last noble statement. "Just keep off my father, please," she said in a low, dangerous voice. "One more remark like that will be the last of any kind you'll ever make to me."

"I've had about enough of this—my obligation, my father's indebtedness. If I could once do something to square up the account, I'd never speak to you again."

Clinton looked alarmed. "Oh, say; here, don't take it like that; don't get sore, Isabel!" he stammered. "I didn't mean anythin'. I take it back. Don't get sore at me, honey. You know it's only because I'm crazy about you that I get a little grouchy sometimes."

"I'd rather have a little less devotion, and a little more decency, then," said Isabel coldly; and she turned away, and went back to Willie.

The morning sagged flatter and flatter; now that the first excitement had passed, there was nothing to do but vie in vain surmises, and pester the officials with useless questions; and although most of the group made extensive use of these diversions, the time still hung heavily.

Clinton sulked by himself. Isabel chat-

ted brightly with the other passengers. People who had observed their association looked at them curiously; the suspicion of a lovers' quarrel was a godsend to all who entertained it, and all to whom they could impart it.

Toward noon some one made the welcome discovery that the dining car, which was near the end of the long train, had not been tipped entirely over, and needed only to be uncoupled to right itself. Its squad was hastily mobilized, and by the time the pangs of hunger had begun to gnaw energetically an excellent hot luncheon was served.

This brightened the place and changed the subject for a time; but in less than an hour the glow had passed, and vain speculation and restlessness held the crowd again.

The long afternoon dragged itself half-way through; Clinton had settled sulkily with his back against a telegraph pole, to a crumpled cross-word puzzle, and Isabel, with all the children of the assembly gathered about her, was giving a dramatic account of the adventures of Robinson Crusoe in a situation similar to theirs, and it seemed as if nothing would ever happen again.

Then a faint, far-away hum was heard somewhere overhead. Dying for distraction people began to lift their heads and peer about.

"A plane!" exclaimed some one. "Gosh, if we can only get it to come down here! It's a chance for somebody to get away!"

IX

At once a stir of excitement revived the wilting crew. Men began to wonder why they hadn't thought of this means of salvation, and the bolder, wealthier, and more anxious ones began to calculate how far they might go in the way of a subsidy.

They waved their hands and handkerchiefs; some of them spent their none too valuable breath in futile shouting; one enterprising spirit borrowed a red coat from a woman passenger, and ran along the track, bearing it streaming behind him.

Clinton, casting aside his sterile diversion, jumped up, the entrancing mirage of a million dollars lighting fires in his dull gray eyes.

Isabel, though aware of the growing animation, was at first too much engrossed in the absorption of her eager listeners to pay much attention to it. But as the faint

hum increased to a steady drone, and that to a sputtering buzz in the immediate neighborhood, she broke off her narrative, and looked about her.

The plane was now directly overhead, and the crowd stood gazing up, almost unanimously with open mouths, so that they looked touchingly like people in the wilderness in immediate expectation of manna.

Isabel's breath suddenly quickened; the thought of the flyer up there brought to her with startling vividness the thought of Ronald Crewe; and the memory of his eager face and wistful dark eyes, as he had looked after her through the car window, caught at her heart.

She looked up as the others were doing—remembering, however, to keep her mouth closed—and saw that the plane was swooping lower in a wide spiral, evidently preparing to land. The rest of the crowd saw it too, and a renewed volley of "Hi's!" and "Hello there's!" burst forth.

Clinton, more animated than any emotion except ill-temper had ever been known to make him, was actually jumping up and down, brandishing his fists in a gesture of threat or entreaty.

The plane circled lower and lower; the noise of the motor became deafening, and then stopped suddenly; and, swooping, the great bird settled to earth.

From the cockpit a single figure, slender, muscular and closely knit, emerged; glanced about, took off a pair of disguising goggles, and showed an eager, boyish face, with a small brown mustache, and a pair of vivid red-brown eyes.

Isabel sat down, abruptly and unexpectedly, on the ground.

Not so the rest of the throng; every one, man, woman and child, was afoot and hurrying to meet him. Some, who knew him by acquaintance or by reputation, called him by name; others merely acclaimed him by inarticulate joyful gibberings. He might have been a heavenly visitant, or a long-hoped-for stranger in an island of hungry cannibals. There was no shadow of doubt that he was welcome.

The first person to reach the plane's side was Clinton. He rushed forward like a long lost brother, his hand outstretched, enthusiastic greetings on his tongue.

"Hello, Crewe, old man! Golly, I'm glad to see you! How'd you happen to fetch up in this neck o' the woods, eh?"

Ronald Crewe looked around him, blinking. He had evidently expected no such ovation.

"I saw an 'extra' in Kansas City that told about the wreck; so I got hold of a machine and flew over to see if I could be of any use."

"Well, by jingo, that was kind of you! You bet you can be of use, the biggest kind. You can help me get a barrel of coin if you'll take me to Denver; and I'll see you get your share, too—don't worry about that."

By this time other welcomers were crowding them closely and, Clinton having broken the ice of delicacy, other requests and proffers spattered thick and fast.

"Oh, Captain Crewe—I don't know whether you remember me; I met you at the Blakes'—it's of the most tremendous importance to me to get to Denver by eight o'clock. I don't like to speak about compensation—but—"

"Say, Mr. Crewe, if you'll get me to Denver before midnight, I'll give you five hundred dollars, and all expenses."

"Don't listen to him, bo; he's a piker. You take me to Denver any time to-night, and I'll make it a thousand."

Ronald Crewe brushed all these suggestions aside tersely, his eyes searching the crowd. "Sorry, I'm not available for hire. Not even for favors. There's only one spare seat in my plane, and that's reserved for Miss Isabel Lee. Where is she?"

Isabel, hearing her name mentioned in that voice which had to her ear a quality unlike any other, rose slowly to her feet, and stood uncertain.

Her heart was beating fast; she was thrilled and ecstatic in every fiber to think that the knight-aviator had come cleaving the air with his swift wings to rescue her alone; yet going away with him presented a significance which she could not disguise from herself.

Through a rift in the crowd he saw her, and came striding to her side, his eyes alight. "Here you are!" he said. "I've come for you."

Isabel's fingers tingled in his clasp, but she was afraid to answer. Whatever she said must be both too little, and too much.

"You're—you're very kind," she answered at last, in a low voice. "But I—I wonder if I ought to go."

Clinton pushed through the interested crowd, and joined them. "Don't be a

fool, Isabel!" he expostulated sharply. "It's the same thing if you go or I go, ain't it? As long as the job gets done it don't matter who does it. Go along with him, for pity's sake!"

Isabel looked at him for a moment, then turned to Crewe.

"Will you excuse me," she said, "if I speak alone to—to my fiancé?"

Crewe returned her look steadily. "By all means," he answered quietly. "Don't trouble to go away; I'll see that you have privacy." With a capable, commanding gesture he swished the onlookers back, and left the two alone in a circle of isolation.

Isabel turned to face Clinton squarely.

"If I go with him, Clinton," she said without circumlocution, "I think it more than likely you'll never see me again."

"If you don't go with him," returned Clinton, "dad and I'll never see that million dollars at all."

Isabel looked at him strangely. "I'm to gather, then, that you prefer the million?"

Clinton avoided her eyes, his face growing red. "Oh, don't talk apple sauce, baby. Of course I want you both. Of course."

She stood silent a moment. "Then that's understood," she said. "You shall have your million." She turned away from him, and her eyes leaped to the other man, who was, to her, the only person visible in all that crowd. "Very well, Captain Crewe," she said clearly. "I am going with you."

There was an instant's breathless pause, and then Ronald Crewe dashed forward, and seized her hand.

"You're going with me!" he said. "Thank the Lord!"

X

A GREAT bustle and commotion succeeded this announcement. Everybody, scenting a dramatic situation, pressed forward greedily, staring at Isabel and at Crewe and at Clinton, who, with a red face, was trying to withdraw into inconspicuousness; the disappointed seekers for transportation looked disgruntled, but all the others looked pleasantly excited.

Crewe was rigging Isabel out in a leather coat and helmet; Willie was staggering heroically toward the plane with her suitcase; the other children were shouting shrill requests to be taken along.

Everything was ready, the passenger was

in the cockpit, the pilot standing by to start the propeller, an eager volunteer shaking the "joy stick," and the crowd waiting for the take-off, when Isabel gave an exclamation.

"My bag! Clinton! The bag the papers are in!"

Clinton, distracted from his embarrassment, hurried toward her. "What sort of a bag is it?"

"Why, your father's dispatch-bag—the bag I've been carrying all the time. Small, black morocco, with two handles."

"Where'd you have it last?"

"Over there where I was telling the children stories. I must have dropped it when the airplane came."

All the idle people, delighted to have something to do, made it their business to look for the lost article, and in an instant somebody piped up:

"Here it is! Right where you were sitting!"

Clinton handed it in with a lowering face.

"You take a little better care of it from now on, won't you?" he said unpleasantly.

"I surely will," promised Isabel, "since I've learned how important it is to you." She looked at him steadily, and he turned away, the color rising over his face again in a dull tide.

Now all the preliminaries were done. Ronald Crewe sent a quick, searching glance into Isabel's eyes, said "All ready?" and started the engine whirring; the farewells of the crowd rose in a chorus of squeaks; Isabel turned on Clinton, standing sulkily aside, a look of completely resigned farewell; and they ran buzzing along the ground, and began to rise into the air.

It was her first experience of flying. As the plane rose her spirits rose with it, up from the dull earth and the boring crowd and Clinton, up into space and freedom and the forgetting of care.

This was life; it seemed to her the first time she had really lived. The people were far below, she fluttered her hand to them and forgot them; and her heart flew high into the clear air, with her pilot.

Her pilot; she looked at him, sitting straight and strong and reliant, complete master of the craft and of the situation, and suddenly she realized that it was being with him that gave flying its peculiar, delicious exhilaration.

She had never known such an exquisite emotion, she had never been so happy in her life; and yet it seemed to her that she had always been doing this, soaring up into the clear air with Ronald Crewe. How natural it was, how inevitable!

As soon as he heard that she was in difficulties, he had come to rescue her, and now he was carrying her away from all de-pressions and complications, with him.

As if he felt her look, he turned and met it; and his eyes, even through the goggles, spoke straight into hers. The noise of the motor prevented talking, but that seemed to matter not at all. One doesn't need the tongues of men if the more subtle tongues of angels are available.

Isabel throbbed and glowed with the implications of his look. He must have divined the significance of the interview between herself and Clinton, for his eyes had lost the wistfulness of yesterday, and looked at her with a definite message.

Her heart leaped with the thought that now, once she had done her errand, his eyes and his tongue too were free to speak to her as they pleased.

She had only to get to those vanadium beds and lay those papers to rest on them, and then her debt would be paid, Uncle Jim and Clinton would have their million, and she would have her—

The thought broke off with a snap. Everything had happened so quickly, she had been so absorbed in the readjustment of her own point of view, that she had had no time to think of the way this enterprise would affect him.

Now she realized for the first time that her success meant his failure; if she secured the vanadium beds for Uncle Jim, he must lose them for the Government; if she won her freedom, he must lose, perhaps his position of trust, perhaps his professional honor.

This realization wiped all the exultation out of the intoxicating moment. What was the advantage of her riding to victory, if it meant his plunging into failure?

How could she use him for her own purpose, and dishonor him in the using? It was intolerable. With an irresistible impulse, she stooped to pick up the bag of papers and drop it over the side.

But there was her promise to Clinton, there was her debt to Uncle Jim. She put the bag down again, and stared gloomily at a scar on the side of the cockpit, instead of at the radiant day that glowed about her.

He felt or sensed her movement, and looked around at her.

"Matter?" he shouted, over the roaring of the engine.

"Nothing!" she shouted back.

"— — something?" he insisted.

"No!" she disclaimed, shaking her head. She could not tell him; she must go on with it.

They flew high and steadily. It grew very cold; the warmly lined leather jacket, which had seemed to Isabel unbearably thick and heavy when she first put it on, was barely enough now to keep out the rushing wind.

She shivered, but she knew it was not from cold alone. They were flying over the foothills of the mountains now, all velvety in their fresh foliage, and she tried to make herself enjoy the experience; the many shades of new green picked out by the somber masses of the pines, the dark rocks jutting through them, the occasional clear flash of a pool, made a beautiful picture, and one which she knew she ought to appreciate.

But her new reflections had taken all joy out of the experience. Every minute brought her nearer to triumph, and her generous rescuer nearer to defeat. She dreaded to reach the end of her journey, but she had given her word and could not turn back.

And the end of the journey meant the end of this episode, the end of the queer, brief, breath-snatching experience that made the leather jacket in front of her seem to her to hold all that was most precious in the world.

Of course he wouldn't be able to endure her, when he knew that she had betrayed him. The end of the journey meant the end of the world, for her.

He looked around at her again, uneasily.

"All right?" he shouted.

She nodded, and made a valiant effort to smile reassuringly; but his face was anxious, and soon he glanced around again.

She wondered if he thought she was ill. On that point, at least, she could reassure him; she fished in the pockets of the jacket, found some paper and a stub of pencil, and wrote:

I am perfectly well. Don't give me a thought. I owe you too much already.

She leaned forward, steadyng herself by his shoulder, and slipped the paper into his

hand; and when he had read it he flashed his swift smile back at her. But the smile only made her sense of guilt stab deeper; how would he look at her if he knew?

They had traveled a couple of hours; the sun, which had been westering when they started, was getting low, and the rushing air colder and colder; and Isabel, shivering with chill and depression, was wondering how soon she could hope to get to Denver, when she became aware of a change in her pilot's attitude.

His easy erectness had grown tense, he moved uneasily, cocking his head to listen. Obviously something was wrong, and when she too hearkened for it, even her unpracticed ear could detect an unevenness in the beat of the motor.

In a moment she saw that he was looking for a place to land. Lessening speed, he peered out over one side and then over the other, and soon they began going down.

They went gently, in wide circles; it was not even as violent as the descent of an elevator; and when the roar of the engine suddenly ceased, it was like floating down a softly descending stream of water.

Isabel was sorry when a slight jar told her they had reached the earth; the strange and delightful sensation had brought back the first joy of the flight.

"Whew!" exclaimed Ronald Crewe, standing up and turning to her. "That was a near thing! Were you frightened?"

"No," answered Isabel simply. "I was with you."

Ronald Crewe said nothing aloud, but his eyes exclaimed, "You darling!" in unmistakable terms.

He clambered out, and came to her side to help her; and, seeing her, stiff with cold and with long sitting still, trying in vain to rise, he lifted her out bodily in his strong arms, and set her gently on the ground.

Then he turned to his craft. The engine was covered by a hood something like an automobile's; and underneath this he examined curiously, anxiously, for some minutes.

"Well," he said at last, turning back to Isabel with a sober face, "it looks like a pretty long pause for us. But I suppose we haven't any kick coming; a little more, and we'd have paused for good."

Isabel, who had had time to take off her gauntlets and goggles, and shake herself into a state of more normal circulation, looked at him wide-eyed.

"You mean we'd have—smashed?" she questioned.

"Smashed to kingdom come. We got down just in time."

"Then the machine's in bad shape?"

"It certainly is one sick plane. If we hadn't found this valley when we did—Well, anyway, we did find it, and we're here safe and sound. A little more, and the serial would have ended with this issue."

Isabel looked about her. They were in a long, grassy dell, sheltered by tall trees and made green by a little brook that ran chattering down the middle.

On each side the hills rose in a rolling swell; the sun had disappeared somewhere behind their rounded summits, and the green valley was already purpling with twilight. There was not a sign of human habitation or activity to be seen.

"Then what about Denver?" she asked.

XI

"Oh, my dear child, Denver simply isn't on our map, just now. I'm awfully sorry—I hate like everything to discombobulate your plans—but truly we're lucky to be in Colorado at all, instead of in a 'better land.'

"There isn't a chance of Denver before to-morrow. Will it make a lot of difference? Will you mind very much?"

Instead of disturbing Isabel, the news that Denver was eliminated from the immediate prospect made her spirits leap up like a skyrocket. If she couldn't get there to-night, she couldn't; if she couldn't get there in time to-morrow, still it wouldn't be her fault; and meantime she wasn't spiking his guns, she was free of the horrible self-reproach that had been sticking like a spike in her own side.

She looked at him with eyes from which the trouble was suddenly chased away by a bright light of contentment.

"I don't mind at all," she assured him. "If we've tried our best and can't make it, we aren't responsible. It's what the insurance companies call an 'Act of God,' and we have to resign ourselves to it—I'm quite resigned."

"You're quite perfect," remarked Ronald Crewe, his eyes devouring her with adoration. "You're as wise as you are lovely, though if any one had asked me I'd have said it wasn't possible."

"All right then, we'll make the best of it. And as far as I'm concerned, I must

say—to put it conservatively—it might be worse."

Isabel felt that, if she had spoken her full mind, she must have admitted that a better place would be rather difficult to find anywhere.

She loved camping; she was going to camp in a garden-spot; and she was going to do it, in a situation whose unavoidableness made it entirely proper, with the most congenial, delightful, desirable companion she had ever known.

Her heart sang carols as, capably and practically, she set to work gathering fire-wood.

The valley was sheltered by tall pine trees; although the dusk was falling chill, no wind visited it, and they soon had a heart-warming blaze leaping and crackling upward beside the foaming brook. They worked together in complete accord, like old comrades.

"I will make my kitchen, and you shall keep your room," quoted Crewe, laying stones for a fireplace,

"Where white flows the river, and bright blows the broom;

"And you shall—" He broke off abruptly.

Isabel caught up his interruption hastily; she knew that verse too, and delicious as it was, she felt it hardly the thing her Aunt Charlotte would have approved under the circumstances.

"It's all very well to talk about kitchens," she said, "if there's anything to kitch. But I wish you wouldn't do it now, when there's nothing, and we're so hungry."

"Nothing to kitch!" repeated Crewe, gazing at her with reproach. "Who are you talking to? Who do you think you're shipwrecked with? Why, the Swiss Family Robinson wasn't in it with us for resources! Just fix your eye on me."

Going to the passive plane, he delved into its depths and emerged with a canvas-covered kit, and two or three bundles, which he laid at her feet triumphantly.

Unpacked, they proved to contain nearly all the comforts of home; a little skillet with plates, and folding cups, and a canteen inside it; bacon, coffee, sugar, and bread; and—actually—a package of fruit, and a jar of cream.

Isabel gave rapturous ejaculations at each disclosure. "Why, it's a miracle!" she exclaimed. "All these elegances out

of that dirty little air motor boat! You're a regular magician. You're marvelous."

He glowed under her tributes. "Oh, it's nothing; just a little forethought. I've been in planes enough to know that you never can tell, so I made a few preparations; there's more space around that floor than you might think, even when the human hoof is parked there.

"Of course the cream was a lottery; but I figured that if we landed hard enough to smash it we'd probably be smashed ourselves, so it wouldn't matter."

Isabel tucked up the sleeves of the French frock under the leather ones of the jacket, and went to the brook to wash for the delightful task of getting supper.

The setting sun outlined the peaks of the hills above her with flame, the little foamy stream caught rose-color from the sky; beauty filled her heart, her fingers tingled in the icy water. She had been wrong when, flying, she thought she had reached the peak of happiness; she was even happier now.

When she got back to the fire, Crewe had already developed a burning bed of twigs in his stone firepot, and was fitting the handle to the little skillet; and kneeling side by side, they cooked the bacon, and made coffee in the canteen.

Isabel spread the wrapping papers for a tablecloth, and cut the bread with his pocketknife, and laid two places neatly, with cups, and plates, and a spray of fern at each. The fragrance of the sizzling bacon and the boiling coffee mingled in a heavenward incense. The birds sang even-song.

"Oh," sighed Isabel, "if heaven is any nicer than this, I don't want to go there. I couldn't stand it."

"It isn't any nicer," said Crewe with conviction, "or one quintillionth as nice. Nothing created, above or below, is as exquisite as this. Sit down, and let me pour the coffee. You're the queen, and I'm the menial."

"You stoop to—to serve," said Isabel, amending her phrase hastily because it was too significant.

"I'd stoop to clean your little shoes," answered he, bending over her with the coffeepot, "and think it an honor."

There were no forks or spoons, but they ate the bacon on the bread, and stirred the coffee with a twig, and he wiped her fingers with his big handkerchief. They were very

hungry; they cooked more bacon and more coffee. They were very happy, and everything made them laugh.

"This bacon is lonely for eggs," said Crewe, looking sympathetically at the greasy curl in his fingers, "but eggs that are scrambled before they're cooked are hard to handle, so I didn't bring any."

"My bacon doesn't care," said Isabel, munching contentedly.

They laughed ecstatically. Isabel had forgotten that she could be so silly, and that it was such fun.

XII

THE last of the sunset slipped away behind the mountains, the birds stopped singing and went to sleep; there was no light but the firelight, and no sound but the chatter of the little river.

They finished their supper, and washed the dishes, and put them away neatly. Then, in the fireglow, they leaned back against a boulder and settled down to talk.

As so often happens when people have a great deal to talk about, for awhile they said nothing at all. The fire flickered and glowed; Isabel looked at the dancing flames; Ronald looked at Isabel.

She was aware of his vivid brown eyes, worshiping her, caressing her; but the moment was so perfect, so enchanted, that she dreaded the definiteness of speech. Then, somewhere in the darkness beyond the stream, an owl hooted suddenly; she started at the sound; and he put his hand over hers.

"Isabel," he said softly.

"Yes—Ronald," she answered, still looking at the fire.

"Isabel—you know I love you."

She gave him a swift, a very fleeting look. She knew he loved her, well enough.

"Isabel, when you told me what you did, in the train—when I knew you were really promised to that chap, I thought I was killed. Honestly—I know it sounds ridiculous—but when I was shot and given up for dead, in the war, it didn't hurt as much.

"I followed you to the other train thinking I'd get one last look at you, and then I wouldn't care if I smashed up in the next flight."

"Oh, Ronald! You wouldn't do that!"

"Not on purpose, no; I'm not a coward; but it's so easy—well, you've seen for yourself, to-day, how easy it is if you don't watch out. I could have done it well

enough, and nobody have been the wiser or the worse.

"But I saw your face through the window, when you didn't know I was seeing you; and I saw you weren't happy, you didn't love him at all."

"And I knew, I just *knew*, that you were a girl who couldn't marry without love; I knew you wouldn't sell your precious self for all the money in the world. That's why I followed you."

"I see. I wondered why."

"No, you didn't wonder, darling; you knew I'd follow you to the ends of the earth, let alone to Utah. And now you know what I want you to tell me. I want you to say that I guessed right when I guessed your coming with me meant you were free. Isabel, sweetheart—you love me, don't you?"

She turned her eyes to him. Even in the faint firelight, even if she had wanted to, she could not have concealed their message; it shone out, glorious. "Yes," she said. "I love you."

"Oh!" cried Ronald; and he dropped her hand, and opened his arms to engulf her. "Oh, sweetheart, we'll be married tomorrow!"

But these winged words brought her mind back sharply to her uncle's business, the onerous duty which had been forgotten since the accident that dropped them into Eden. She drew back quickly, before his arms had time to close around her.

"Don't touch me!" she said.

He gazed at her, amazed and hurt. "Why not? You love me!"

"Y—yes."

"Well, then, can't I kiss you? Isabel—it isn't that you don't trust me?"

"No, no. I trust you, dear. But—you make a mistake to trust *me*."

He stared in perplexity, his eager arms dropping to his sides. "I don't understand you, Isabel. I don't think this is a time to talk in riddles."

"Oh, it isn't, it isn't. It's a time to talk truth. But I have such a horrid truth to tell, Ronald—you'll hate me so when you hear it—I can hardly bring myself to say it."

She saw his ruddy face grow paler in the firelight; but he leaned toward her again. "I don't care what it is, sweetheart. Tell me. I swear I'll love you just the same."

"You won't. You can't. Ronald, to buy my freedom I'm selling—your honor."

"Selling my honor! What do you mean?"

"I mean something abominable. I mean I'm getting Clinton and his father to release me, by stealing those—those wretched vanadium beds, from you!"

Still he stared at her in round-eyed perplexity. Obviously she had surprised him so much that he could not understand her.

"I don't see what you're driving at, sweetheart. What have you to do with the vanadium beds? And what's his father to do with you?"

She drew a long, quivering breath. "Oh, it's a long story. My father was—I don't know exactly what to call him; what he called himself was a promoter, but I suppose other people would have used a different word.

"He was always involving himself in wonderful schemes, and the schemes were always involving him in trouble; and we were always moving on to some other place.

"Finally something very serious happened, I never understood just what; he fell afoul of the law somehow, and Uncle Jim—that's Clinton's father—saved him from jail. And soon after that he died—poor dear; I loved him, anyway."

Ronald made a little sound of sympathy, and put his hand on hers; but she drew hers away. She had no right, she felt, to his caresses.

"Then I was all alone, and I hadn't a penny in the world; and Uncle Jim was my guardian, and he took me to live with him. He was always very, very kind to me, and I was grateful to him.

"When Clinton wanted me to marry him, Uncle Jim said he wanted it too, more than anything, and so I hadn't any choice. I owed him everything, you see.

"But when I promised to get the vanadium, I didn't have an idea that the other person who wanted it was you! And then—everything got mixed up.

"They had to have it by Friday, or lose a million dollars; and Clinton said—not exactly in words, but we both understood—that if I'd save the million I could be free.

"And so I came with you—to steal it from you! And if I ever get free to love you, I'll be too disgraced!"

She was crying now; the tears rained down her cheeks, and she dropped her head on her hands, and shook with sobs. Ronald Crewe gazed at her for another moment,

and then he made a little sound, between a caress and a chuckle, and gathered her into his arms.

"You darling little goose, stop crying!" he said. "I'm not after that vanadium at all!"

XIII

ISABEL lifted her head and, still wet-eyed and quivering, drew back to stare at him.

"You're not after the vanadium!" she exclaimed. "But—but Uncle Jim told me you'd been to South America to look at some more vanadium, and were rushing back to buy this!"

"I did go to South America, and I did rush back; but it was to tell the Government that the South American beds were better than anything that ever happened here. They were all bought, by cable, less than an hour after I got to Washington.

"I suppose your uncle was so sure of this Utah stuff—as all the people around the Bureau were—that he never thought of the other possibility; but the fact is I'm on my way just to look at a copper mine for a private capitalist."

It was Isabel's turn to blink in bewilderment.

"Then I've been doing all this worrying for nothing! Then I *wasn't* stealing from you, after all!"

"Of course you weren't, sweetheart. You were doing your duty, like an honest little citizen.

"So let me kiss the tears away; and you'll marry me to-morrow, and never cry again." He tried to take her in his arms once more.

She was on the point of yielding, for she wanted very much to be in them; but now her readjusted viewpoint flew around like a boomerang, and hit her between the eyes. She drew back again from his eager embrace, her face startled and pale.

"Oh, but Ronald! If this is all a wild-goose chase—if I'm not getting the million for Uncle Jim—then I'm engaged to Clinton, after all!"

"Oh, no, you're not!" protested Ronald. "What, engaged to that—that pudgy goof? Oh, no, Isabel! No, darling! You're engaged to me, and nobody else. Why, he as good as said that he'd let you go for money."

"I know; but I haven't got the money."

"But you don't mean to tell me that you, that a girl of your fastidiousness and fine-

ness, would seriously contemplate marrying a cad like that, who admits that he prefers a million dollars to you! It's too absurd."

"Ronald—he has my promise."

"Bosh and tosh! A promise like that is better not kept, and you know it. There's nothing to hold you to him."

"There's the realest thing in the world, the thing that made me give the promise—my debt to his father. Uncle Jim saved my father from dying in jail; he took me in when I hadn't a roof over my head, and he's treated me like a daughter ever since.

"It's his dearest wish that I should marry Clinton; and until I've done something to pay what I owe him, I'm not free to marry any one else."

Ronald's face clouded with consternation at sight of her resolute look.

"But, darling, surely he wants you to be happy. He wouldn't hold you against your will."

"He'd hold me within his own rights. Uncle Jim's kind, but he's hard. I don't believe anybody's ever owed him anything, and got away without paying it. Let go my hand, dear; it isn't mine to give you."

Seeing her distress, he let her go; and, leaning back against the rock, he stared gloomily at the fire. The owl hooted again, and Isabel shivered. The joy had all gone out of the lovely hour; the place was no longer an enchanted garden, only a rather damp and chilly field.

"Of course," said Ronald after a pause, "I'm not going to let you get away from me now; you know as well as I do that I can't think of such a thing.

"But I'm trying to figure out the best way to free you from what you feel to be a binding obligation. Your guardian lives in Washington, does he?"

"Yes."

"And what's his name?"

"James Fanrell."

"James Fanrell! Why, I know him—slightly, that is."

"Oh, yes, I knew you did; it was because he saw you Sunday night, hurrying from the boat to the train, that he sent me off on this errand. Of course, he has mining interests, too."

"Yes, so I've heard. Well, now, since you feel so strongly about this, I propose that we go to Washington, just as soon as we can get there, and put the matter before him.

"I'm perfectly sure, when he hears what

a cad his son is, and how you've learned to love somebody else, he'll tell you to let bygones be bygones, and think no more about it."

She shook her head. "You don't know Uncle Jim. He'll never let me off as easily as that."

"But he loves you, doesn't he? Of course, everybody must."

"Yes, he loves me; but not enough to let me have my way if it conflicts with his. All these two years that I've lived with him I've wanted to work, to earn my spending-money, and feel that I wasn't a parasite; but he thought it would lower his prestige with his business associates, and he forbade it.

"Last summer I was invited to go on a cruise to the Mediterranean in the Seymours' yacht, and I wanted to, awfully; but he didn't wish me to leave him and Clinton, and so I stayed home."

"Haven't you a will of your own, sweetheart?"

"I'll give you ten guesses about that! But this isn't a question of will, it's a question of obligation. As soon as he mentions what I owe him, don't you see, I'm helpless."

Crewe was silent for a minute, still studying the fire. Then he turned to her with sudden decision.

"Isabel, beloved, look at me," he said. "You love me, don't you?"

She raised her eyes to him. "Oh, Ronald—you ask me that?"

"And you want to do something practical about it?"

"Of course I do—if there's anything to be done."

"Very well, then. Come with me to that sick plane, and hold the flash light for me like a good nurse while I operate; and then, at the crack o' dawn, we'll be off for Washington."

"What! Fly to Washington?"

"Why not? We can make it twice as quickly as we could by train, especially from this neighborhood, and with the main line washed out. We can be in Washington by to-morrow night, and married by the next night."

Isabel shook her head at this optimistic forecast, but she looked distinctly cheered at the prospect of action. As he sprang to his feet, and wanted to kiss her, she held him at arm's length.

"Just one kiss," he begged.

"No," she said firmly. "But—the sooner we get to that airplane, the sooner—" She interrupted herself, turning from him and running to the plane.

"You darling!" he cried as he followed her.

It was very dark now; except for the waning fire and a prickle of stars above the tree tops there was no light at all. The first owl was being answered by another, their long-drawn hoots echoed in a melancholy antiphony across the glade, and far away among the hills a coyote howled.

But the little bright circle of the electric torch held the two hemmed into a tiny area of light and comradeship; Ronald wrenched and bent and hammered, Isabel perched on the edge of the cockpit, and turned the light as he directed.

Sometimes he looked up at her and asked "Tired?" and she shook her head brightly, though indeed she was weary enough to drop; sometimes they just exchanged a swift smile without interrupting the work at all, bound together in understanding as lovers are.

At last it was done. Ronald lifted Isabel down from her perch; and as he stowed the tools into the plane they both noticed the little bag that held the papers sitting peaceably on the bottom of the car.

It was the only piece of luggage she had brought—unless you count her pocketbook, with her ticket and handkerchief, and powder puff, as luggage—for there had been no room for her suitcase.

"To-morrow night, sweetheart," said Ronald, putting his arm around her shoulders, "we'll be finished with that bagful of papers, and all the scheming it represents."

"I'm not so sure," answered Isabel, shaking her head. "That little black satchel has stood for so much in my life, I can't feel optimistic about getting rid of it so soon. It's an allegory—my bag, holding Uncle Jim's business."

"I promise you," said Ronald confidently, "it's one piece of luggage we won't take with us on our honeymoon." He drew her toward the fire, rubbing his cheek against her soft hair, and murmuring in her ear:

"I will make you brooches, and toys for your delight,
Of bird-song at morning, and star-shine at night;
I will make a palace fit for you and me
Of green days in forests, and blue days at sea."

"Oh," sighed Isabel, "it's too sweet, it's too perfect ever to come true. Ever since

I've been old enough to think of love I've dreamed of a lover who would say those words to me. But, Clinton—" She shuddered.

"You're not going to think of him, beloved, ever any more. I'm going to make you a bed of ferns, and then I'm going to build up a great big fire that will keep off Clinton, and the coyotes, and all the other pests; and then I'm going to watch over you while you sleep, and give you dreams of all the green days and blue days we're going to live."

She protested drowsily, as he worked to build up her sylvan domesticity; but when, on her bed of ferns, she slipped away into the sleep of deep weariness, her last memory was of Ronald sitting near her within the fireglow, his back against the boulder and his dark eyes upon her, full of delicious dreams.

XIV

THE morning climbed up rosily over the hills, and Isabel and Ronald arose as promptly as itself. It is easy to be early afoot when you have slept on beds of ferns, or boulders, as all experienced campers know.

The cold splash of the brook and the healthy exercise of fetching wood and water soon whipped her blood into brisk activity; and by the time Ronald, who had been going over his engine again while she got breakfast, joined her at the fireside she was sparkling and bright-eyed.

Ronald, himself very ruddy and springy after a night that had certainly been far from sybaritic, looked on her with rapture.

"You get lovelier and lovelier with every minute, in geometrical progression," he said. "I hate to think what you'll look like by night, if this goes on. I'll have to take to smoked glasses."

"It won't surprise me if you have to take to a black patch. I dread that interview with Uncle Jim."

"Now, sweetheart, don't you cross your Uncle Jim until you come to him. Put all your prayers on getting to Washington; we'll need 'em."

"Isn't the motor all right now?"

"It looks all right; but it certainly had a bad case of heaves yesterday, and while I'm a pretty fair general practitioner, I'm no specialist. Do I make you nervous, dear, talking like this?"

"I couldn't be nervous with you, sky-

pilot. I'd jump off the Brooklyn Bridge if you told me it was all right."

"You loveliest! I promise you I'll never take any chances with your precious neck; I wouldn't start out if I didn't think it was safe. I just want to warn you not to be disappointed if we should be delayed."

"Oh, Ronald, we mustn't be delayed if we can possibly help it! Uncle Jim's going to be angry enough at our spending one night on the way; if we spend another he'll be furious."

"How many times must I tell you, darling stubborn-head, that what your Uncle Jim thinks doesn't matter one bean? If he doesn't like us, just tell him to take us as we are."

Isabel shook her head; she had seen too many people cringe before James Fanrell's wrath to be able to accept this callous optimism. But she could not cherish depression in the face of the vivid boyish smile that she found so delightful, and the rosy morning that was peering over the hilltops. She flashed her own warm smile back again at him.

"As long as he gobbles up the two of us together, I'll die happy," she said.

They finished the small remainder of food, and packed up the kit, and put out the fire carefully; and then Ronald buttoned Isabel into her leather jacket, and strapped her helmet on.

He made very heavy weather of this last operation, his fingers lingering under her chin as if they had gone to sleep there.

"Not even one kiss?" he pleaded.

Isabel remained firm. "Not one. They are not mine to give, yet; technically, Clinton has exclusive rights to them until we get a release from Uncle Jim."

Ronald sighed. "You wouldn't deny a starving man food on a legal technicality," he said pathetically, "and that's practically what I am."

"I wouldn't dispose of goods that I hadn't a legal title to, either. You don't want to make a felon of me, do you?"

"If nothing will induce you to kiss me, let's start for Washington."

He put her into her little compartment, and himself into his own, showed her how to shake the plane's control lever as he started the propeller, and they moseyed forthwith up into the clear, cold air. They flew from the shadowed valley straight into the radiant morning.

Sunshine flooded them like a deluge of

new life, the rushing wind blew away all the past. Little things, prosaic things of every-day, fell into insignificance, shrunken and flat like the fore-shortened heights of the earth below.

Isabel's spirits shot up as they had done yesterday, as they had done on the first day of her travels with this energetic young man. Ronald was right; there was nothing in the world so delightful as starting off on a journey, on a spring morning, with a congenial companion; a charming companion, a thrilling companion, an entrancing, entralling—

She interrupted herself with a start. This was Thursday; as lately as last Monday morning she had never set eyes on this companion, and now, in less than four days, she was exhausting the dictionary without being able to do justice to her opinion of him.

Looked at dispassionately, it was rather surprising. But nothing could surprise a really open-minded person very much on such a day, at such an altitude; more surprising was the thought that she had ever managed to eke out for twenty years a be-nighted existence devoid of him.

They flew on rapidly and smoothly, the panorama of the earth unrolling and slipping behind them like a perfectly run cinema; and Isabel's misgivings had unrolled and slipped away too, leaving her at rest on a blissful conviction that this was going on forever, when, on transferring her eyes from the landscape to the pilot—as she frequently did, to rest and refresh them—she noticed that he was exhibiting the same symptoms as yesterday.

He listened tensely, he peered into the fuselage, he moved uneasily. Presently he looked at her, and even through the goggles she read anxiety. He turned back to his work, and the machine leaped forward with perceptibly increased speed.

XV

ISABEL looked down. For a long time she had noticed that they were following a railroad; its long, straight parallels stretched across the level prairie land as far before them and behind them as the eye could reach.

Now, for the first time, she saw in the distance the smoke of a large city, toward which they were heading, and guessed that Ronald was hurrying to reach its outskirts before he was forced to descend.

A pang of misgiving seized her; she might have known that this swift, unchecked flight to happiness was too good to be true.

She had guessed right. Ronald flew fast until he was just outside the city, then slackened, circled, and descended. Her spirits dropped as the plane did; a halt—a delay—Uncle Jim's anger; failure!

The place where they had landed was an aviation field, and at the noise of their coming several men, some in mechanics' overalls, some trimly accoutered for flying, came toward them from the hangars. Ronald helped Isabel out before greeting them.

"Just wait a jiffy, sweetheart, while I talk to these fellows," he said to her, "and then we'll have a conference, and see what we'd better do."

"Where are we?" asked Isabel anxiously.

"Omaha."

"Oh, dear, no farther than that?"

"That's not so bad. Excuse me, darling; I'll be with you in a minute. Why, hello, Shorty! Hello, fellows, how are you?"

Isabel stood aside, looking on with mingled pride and alarm. Evidently Ronald was known, in person or by reputation, to all these men; those who could claim acquaintance did so proudly, those who could not gazed at him with eager interest; and this evidence of the esteem in which he was held warmed her heart.

But when she watched the head-shakings over the machine, her anxiety increased; she was sure, direfully sure, they could never reach Washington that night.

Ronald came back to her at last, looking undeniably concerned, though he flashed his swift smile at her.

"Cheer up, sweetheart; it's not so bad. Anyway it might be a lot worse."

"Will it take long to fix?"

"A good while, I'm afraid. It's got a pretty bad fit of the blues."

"How long, Ronald?"

"All day, at least."

"Oh—oh, Ronald! Then we can't possibly get to Washington to-night, and Uncle Jim will never forgive me!"

"Bosh and tosh, dear. That isn't the only plane on earth; Noah preserved two of everything. These are awfully good fellows, and they're going to fit me out with another ship."

"While they're getting it ready, you and I'll skip into town, and have a wash-up and

a bite to eat. They're calling a taxi for us. But mind, if I hear a single word about Uncle Jim, I'll start a war."

At these magic words Isabel brightened perceptibly.

"Wash up! Eat!" she exclaimed, beginning to peel off her armor. "Lead me to them, and I won't say a single word about anything else."

For awhile, as they faced each other across the festive little table in the city's most luxurious hotel, she kept her promise, for she was so hungry and the food so ambrosial that at first conversation about any other subject was impossible.

But presently, happening to glance across the big empty room at the lobby on which it opened, she gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"Why, there's a man who was on our damaged train! Or am I dreaming?"

"No, it's perfectly possible; I met one of them myself, while I was waiting for you to doll up. He told me a relief train came for them last night, and dumped them here in the small hours. I suppose there are lots of them hanging around the neighborhood, waiting for trains out."

"Then—then Clinton—"

"Woman! Beware!" Ronald speared a waffle with a threatening fork.

Isabel subsided meekly into silence, and endeavored to drown her depression with maple syrup; but it persisted. The very thought of Clinton was enough to send her spirits into a decline.

"Now," said Ronald briskly as, fortified by much excellent nourishment, they left the hotel, "just watch us. The day's still young, those good eggs out at the field are going to fix us up with the best little hill-climber you ever saw, and nothing can hold us back. You'll see."

"I'll hope for the best," said Isabel. "Oh—Ronald! I just saw Clinton!"

"Hang Clinton!" returned Ronald. "Forget Clinton. I'm sick of the Clinton-nabulation of his name."

Isabel was too perturbed to be distracted by foolishness. "He saw us. I know he saw us. Oh, dear!"

"Damn, drat, and utterly desiccate Clinton!" said Ronald, bundling her into a taxicab. "You take your mind off him, darling, and give it to me. We're going to hop now to Springfield, Illinois, land there, and have lunch; then we're going to keep right on and—"

"Ronald!" interrupted Isabel. "He's following us in another taxi!"

"I don't care if he's following us in a hearse!" rejoiced Ronald forcefully. "I wish he were!"

They fell into silence, tense and preoccupied on her part, somewhat ruffled on his, which lasted until they reached the flying-field; Clinton's baleful influence sat like a bogey between them all the way.

They found their new craft in readiness. Isabel donned her regiments again, and Ronald strapped her tight in her seat to be ready for extra flying speed.

"Send the other one back as soon as you can get it ready, will you?" he said to his colleagues who stood by. "And send me the bill at Washington."

"How you going there, Rod?" asked one.

"Straight—Illinois, Indiana, Ohio. First stop at Springfield."

"You never could 'a' made Springfield with that old bus."

"She did well by me, though, while she lasted," remarked Ronald, glancing into Isabel's eyes as he climbed into his place.

Isabel answered with a smile, and turned for a farewell look at the plane that had carried them into so happy an adventure. Then she caught at his sleeve.

"Ronald!" she said. "Clinton's there, beside it!"

"Take a good look at him, then," said Ronald carelessly. "It'll be your last."

Isabel took a good look; indeed she could not help it, for Clinton's demeanor, now that he saw himself observed, was striking. His round face was red with rage, and as he glared at the two flyers he actually grew so uninhibited that he shook his fist.

"He doesn't approve of our being here," she said. "It seems to upset him."

"If he'd come along, I'd upset him all right. Now hang on, sweetheart, we're going to start."

The noise of the motor cut off further conversation, but Clinton continued to exhibit symptoms of violent temper, and Isabel continued to gaze at him, fascinated by the spectacle.

As they rose above him, suddenly he hurled himself headfirst into the abandoned plane, fished in the depths, and emerged with a black object of some sort in his hand. Isabel leaned as far as she could to see what it might be, and found that it was the bag of papers.

Since she had learned that they were

valueless she had not given them much thought; and in the excitement of this swift journey she had forgotten all about them. Not so, evidently, Clinton; he brandished the bag in an access of fury.

"If it were a bomb he'd throw it at us," she thought. "It's lucky we're out of his reach."

Which shows how little she knew.

XVI

THE new plane flew as steadily and tirelessly as a swallow. Ronald turned now and then to send Isabel a smile of satisfaction and delight, and she, her spirits lightening as they always did with the lightening of the atmospheric pressure, began to dally with hopeful thoughts of the future.

If all went well, if they arrived in good season, if they had the luck to catch Uncle Jim in a propitious mood, if he weren't too angry about the vanadium beds, if he weren't too chagrined about Clinton—if, and if, and if—if he *should* consent to her marrying Ronald, oh, and oh, and oh!

But even if he consented, they must do nothing rash. If they did, Uncle Jim would be angry for a certainty, and if he were very angry he would do what, under all his indulgence and lavish generosity, she had always detected and feared the possibility of his doing, tell the truth about her father.

She had known, ever since that dreadful night when, shivering with a loneliness more stark and appalling than anything she had ever imagined, she had listened to his telling of what he had done for her newly dead father, and his offer of a refuge for herself, that if she crossed him he would punish her, and that the punishment would take the shape of public disgrace for her father's name and her own.

He had never said so in words, but she had understood. She must be very, very careful, and keep him in a good temper. She mustn't marry Ronald for a long time.

She must get Uncle Jim to come to the wedding. Everything must be decorous and deliberate.

She was very sleepy, after her brief sleep on the bed of ferns with the hard, hard ground underneath, and presently, in spite of the swift motion and the roar of the motor, she fell into a drowse.

The rush of the air in her face became the passage of time; days were marching by smoothly, gloriously; Uncle Jim was

smiling, Ronald was riding triumphantly to claim her, she was floating toward him on a white cloud of tulle and orange blossoms—

Whist! The shutting off of the engine startled her into wakefulness, as a sudden silence will sometimes do even more efficaciously than a sudden noise. She blinked, and looked about her.

They were descending; and peering over the side she saw a large city below. Springfield, of course; she hadn't expected to arrive so soon.

Ronald helped her out with a beaming face.

"How's that for a smooth trip, sweetheart?" he asked her. "This engine goes like love's dream after the ball. It's only about two o'clock now. We can rest here for half an hour, and have dinner somewhere in West Virginia, and make Washington by eight to-night."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Isabel, with a little exuberant wriggle. "Then we'll catch Uncle Jim in his after-dinner relaxedness, and talk him into a mellow mood, and break it to him a *very* little at a time, first the vanadium, then Clinton, then you, and then—us. And when we've got him pleased with us, we'll—"

"Your name Crewe?" demanded a harsh voice, breaking into her happy forecast.

Isabel and Ronald turned, with one movement, and saw themselves confronted by a burly, unsympathetic-looking person with a stubby chin, and a baggy sack suit.

Isabel took an instant dislike to him; and the sentiment seemed to be mutual, for his eye—instead of kindling into enthusiasm, as did most of the masculine eyes that rested on her—stared at her with a cold and fishy disapproval.

"Yes, my name's Crewe," answered Ronald. "Do you want to see me?"

"I do; I want a good long talk with you—and the young woman, too," said the burly man unpleasantly. "If you'll come along quiet, you'll find it'll save you trouble."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Ronald with quick anger. "I don't like your way of speaking of this lady; I think it's confounded cheek. What business have you got with us?"

The man turned back the front of his spotty coat to show a shiny nickel-plated badge.

"I got the business of arrestin' you," he returned, "for violatin' the Mann Act."

Isabel started and stared. She had never been arrested before, and the suggestion was distinctly unsympathetic; the name of the Mann Act too, though only vaguely familiar, struck unpleasantly on her ear.

But shocked though she was, she was entirely unprepared for the effect on Ronald. He drew back with a clenched fist, and eyes blazing with rage; it was obviously only by a great effort that he refrained from smashing the bulky man in the jaw.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "What do you mean by an insult like that? How do you get that way?"

"I got that way over the telephone," returned the bulky man imperturbably, "when a guy named Clinton Fanrell calls up from Omaha, and says you've abducted a girl that ain't of age, kep' her out over night, and transported her from one State to another. You can't deny it, can you?"

"But she's the lady I'm going to marry!"

"You ain't married yet, are you?"

"N-no."

"You ain't of age, are you?" demanded the man of Isabel.

"N-no," she answered reluctantly, as Ronald had done.

"Then," said the bulky man triumphantly, "I guess I gotcha. C'mon. If you'll come quiet, I won't put the handcuffs on you."

Red with rage and humiliation, Ronald consigned the plane to the care of the interested bystanders and, taking Isabel's arm, followed the unwelcome guide to the street.

"Sweetheart," he muttered with a set jaw, "I'd have killed that swine Clinton if I'd had a notion he was capable of a thing like this. I've got a good mind to do it anyway. The filthy cad!"

Isabel shivered closer to him. "I knew he'd do the meanest thing he could when I saw his face, but I never thought of this. What is the Mann Act, anyway?"

Ronald ground his teeth. "Never mind about that; I'll shove it down his throat when I see him. But I don't see how he got on our trail."

"I do, I think. I left Uncle Jim's bag in the other plane, and he found it, and probably got the field-men to tell him where we were going to land by saying he wanted to send it to us."

"How disgusting of him to have us ar-

rested! But of course the judge will let us go when he hears who we are."

Ronald patted her hand; but his face was grim, and her heart dropped down another story in spite of her effort at optimism.

XVII

WHEN they reached the court room, they were at once engulfed in a sordid and depressing confusion. News of the arrest of a famous flyer and a pretty girl had traveled ahead of them, at the usual lightning pace of news which the people concerned wish to suppress, and a small crowd had gathered to feast a greedy curiosity on them.

"That's him! That's the ace!" ran the delighted exclamations. "Gosh, she's a looker! I don't blame him!"

Officials buzzed around them, chivying them hither and thither, putting them through meaningless formalities; eyes stared at them glutonously from every side; there was a murmur of comment and tittering. Isabel felt the hot color rise to the roots of her hair, and veins full of impotent anger stood out on Ronald's temples.

Bzz—bzz—bzz—"Truth, whole truth, 'n' nothin' but the truth—Name?" "Isabel Lee. Spinster. Washington, D. C."—Bzz—bzz—bzz—"Name?" "Ronald Crewe. Mining engineer. Government employ." Bzz—bzz—bzz—"Previous criminal record?" Bzzz.

Ronald and Isabel stood erect and rigid, enduring it, outwardly stony, inwardly seared with the hot humiliation of proud and honorable people placed in a position of shame.

The judge looked at them sternly. A frowzy man in a dirty court uniform leered at Isabel. When the account of their camp in the green palace was elicited, a titter ran through the dingy crowd on the outskirts.

When the torture had gone on for what seemed hours, the judge cleared his throat and announced that, in view of the male defendant's well-known and honorable record, and the female defendant's youth and appearance of respectability, he would suspend sentence, and dismiss them with a warning to be more circumspect in future; and Ronald took Isabel's arm again and drew her, almost roughly, in his eagerness to get her away from the staring eyes, toward the door.

She hurried along beside him, feeling like

a suffocating person who can just hold out until he gets to the air.

And at the door they met the reporters. Alert young men with tortoise-rimmed spectacles, who had caught that rumble along the ground to which a reporter's ear is always attuned, had arrived hot-foot, and were waiting with the notebooks in hand and the pencils ready poised, and pounced at them.

Would they mind giving a few details of their past lives; of their experiences on the journey; of their impressions of Springfield; of their views on free love?

Just outside the vestibule, in the sunshine of the porch, Isabel saw a photographer crouched above his camera, waiting.

She felt physically sick. To-morrow morning every newspaper in the country would carry the tale of this horrible nightmare.

The irony of her having spent so much thought and care on keeping her father's name untarnished, and then dragged her own in the mire like this, smote her in the face like a flung stone.

Ronald leaned down suddenly, and talked low and fast into her ear.

"Darling, I don't mind it for myself, but I can't bear it for you. There's just one way out. Marry me now, right away, the very first minute we can get anybody to do it. Then we can tell 'em all to go to blazes.

"Otherwise there'll be a scandal that'll follow us forever. Will you, dear? Please!"

Isabel felt neither pleasure nor pain at the idea; all she wanted was to get out of this nightmare of peering eyes.

"Very well," she agreed dully.

Ronald squeezed her hand in a warm pressure, and turned to the alert young men.

"Boys," he said, "I want to ask a favor of you. Perhaps you didn't know it, but Miss Lee and I are on our way to get married. I read in the paper that her train was wrecked, and went to get her, but before we could reach a parson, our engine went bad, and we had to come down; and a chap who wanted to marry her himself played this dirty trick on us.

"Now I leave it to you—if any of you are married, or in love, do you like the idea of having your girls held up in the sort of light this puts her in? Then won't you make it just a story of a wedding, or

an elopement if you must, and leave out all the yellow stuff?"

The young men shifted their feet, exhibiting various degrees of hesitation, sympathy, and reluctance. They were nice young men, but they had their living to make; and juicy bits like this did not come their way every day.

Isabel saw their reluctance, and saw the photographer turning his camera to focus it exactly on the doorway. It seemed to her that she could bear no more of this.

"Oh, *please!* *Please!*" she cried in a low, passionate voice; and with an almost unconscious movement she tore off the helmet that seemed to be choking her.

The sight of her pleading, unhappy, beautiful face, suddenly framed in tumbled waves of dark hair, was too much for the young men who, though reporters, were after all human. One after another they pocketed their notebooks, smiling sheepishly.

"There goes the year's best headline," remarked one ruefully.

"Oh, thank you!" cried Isabel, from her heart.

"Boys, I'll never forget this," said Ronald. "Any time you want a flight, let me know, and I'll take you up to the moon. This way, honey."

And with a sudden about-face he whisked her rapidly to a small door which his quick eye had noted at one side and, dodging the crowd and the camera, had her outside before you could say Jack Robinson.

"So that's that! Now for a license," he said briskly, "and then for a justice of the peace. There's a policeman; he'll tell us where to go. Wait inside this peach-colored doorway, dear, and nobody'll see you, on account of the protective coloration."

Isabel waited passively. She was reduced now to a state of complete and miserable quiescence. Everything was wrong; her honorable intentions toward her guardian frustrated, her lovely romance smirched, her knight lowering his plume to take her from the hands of a dingy J. P. instead of from the minster door.

When Ronald had secured his information, she went with him passively to a bleak office, where she yielded up her vital statistics and her signature; then passively to another bleak office, where, after a long delay, a man with a nasal voice and dirty finger nails pronounced them man and wife. Married in a leather helmet—oh, oh!

When it was over, they went to a hotel for a wash and a meal, which Ronald insisted on calling their "wedding breakfast," though it was now four in the afternoon.

Ronald, in spite of all the annoyances and misadventures, was elated. He possessed that direct and simple masculine mind which goes to the core of things regardless of accessories, and he was chiefly concerned with the basic fact that they were married.

He beamed at Isabel across the table, his lean bronzed face fairly shining with happiness.

"Well, sweetheart, we made it!" he exulted. "You can't keep a really good, made-in-heaven match down. We're married as tight as bell and book could have done it!"

"Oh, Ronald, I wish we weren't!" said Isabel sorrowfully. Her face was very wan under her strange bridal headgear.

Ronald's glow clouded. "Why, dearest? Don't you want to be married to me?"

"You know I do. Only I don't want it this way. I don't like having a hole-and-corner wedding, as if it were something to be ashamed of; I wanted to marry you openly and proudly.

"And, dear, I'm miserable about Uncle Jim. I can't tell him. If the reporters got my name right, and if it gets to Washington, I must find some way of keeping to-morrow's papers from him. He mustn't hear it."

Ronald stared at her in consternation. "Isabel! Do you mean to say you're not going to stop worrying about your uncle's wishes now that you're—my wife?"

XVIII

SHE shook her head forlornly. "I can't, dear. You know I've told you all along that I'm not free, until I've paid my debt to Uncle Jim."

"But all that's changed now. You're married to me, whether he likes it or not."

"I know, but that's no fault of his. It doesn't alter my relation to him; I'm in his debt just the same."

"Isabel darling, you carry this thing too far. Suppose you do owe him something, don't you owe me some sort of obligation too? He can't keep you from belonging to me, now that I'm your husband."

"He can punish for it, though."

"Oh, bosh and tosh! This isn't the Middle Ages. What do you think he'll do to

you, shut you up in a donjon-keep, and feed you on hemlock and ratbane?"

Isabel's eyes grew very large and boding, and the half-circles of weariness and worry under them seemed visibly to deepen.

"I know well enough what he'll do," she said in a very low voice. "And he knows too. Dear, I told you my poor father did something—disgraceful.

"I never knew the details, but I think he sold something, stocks or something, that hadn't any value; and if it hadn't been for Uncle Jim he'd have gone to jail.

"It was that that killed him, really; his heart wasn't strong, and he dreaded disgrace more than anything. 'Live cold and lonesome, Bella; go hungry if you must,' he used to say to me, 'but never let disgrace touch our name. I've been the black sheep of my family,' he'd say, 'but I'd die to keep our name clean, and you must too.'

"I promised him I would, the very last thing. If I cross Uncle Jim, he'll tell. And then, Ronald, my poor father's great big terrified, reproachful eyes will come between you and me as long as we live."

There was no doubt about her believing, from the bottom of her soul, what she said; her face had gone pale and pinched with suffering. Ronald, looking at her, felt a great surge of angry tenderness; he wanted to kill the person who made her so needlessly unhappy.

But, realizing that he was confronted with a condition and not a theory, and that something must be done about it if he were to retain his bride, he grew very thoughtful.

"Forgive me if I distress you, sweetheart, by asking questions," he said after a pause, "but do you know what kind of stock it was your father sold?"

"I don't know exactly, but I have an idea it was mining. I used to hear him talk, awhile before, about a mine he'd bought that he called the Chiltern. But after the—the trouble came, he couldn't bear to speak of it, and I never asked him any questions."

Ronald shifted suddenly in his chair, and looked at her with startled attention.

"The Chiltern!" he said. "Are you sure it was Chiltern?"

"Why, yes. It's an odd name, isn't it? But it was a name in our family, and for all his wandering ways he set the greatest store by family traditions. What's the matter, Ronald?"

Ronald pushed back his chair. "Nothing. It's an odd name, as you say; sounds like something in English history. Are you sure you've finished, dear? You haven't eaten enough for a mosquito, but if you won't have any more perhaps we'd better be off. It's almost half past four."

Isabel jumped up in alarm. "Oh, is it so late? Oh, Uncle Jim will be furious! Come, come quick!"

They hurried back to the plane, and set out again on a journey which had lost all its thrill. The sun was well toward the west, and though Ronald bundled her up like a papoose in a big sleeping-bag that he had stopped in the city to buy, Isabel was cold.

And her heart was colder than her body; all joy seemed to have gone out of her. She wept a little, forlornly, when Ronald's back was turned.

To cry on your wedding journey, what bad luck! But what a wedding journey, bound to end in either separation or disgrace.

When it was very dark, they descended at the edge of a West Virginian town and, to the interested astonishment of all the inhabitants who had the luck to be abroad, went to a battered-looking inn, and got what refreshment they could.

Isabel was too weary and dispirited now to heed the curious eyes that followed their movements; she ate, and swallowed her yawns of fatigue with her food, and smiled valiantly but wanly at Ronald.

He, on his part, was preoccupied and hungry; he patted her hand with infinite tenderness when he saw the smile, but lapsed at once into a brown study.

"Now you rest a few minutes, precious girl," he said when he had finished his supper, "while I go and call up Washington. I want to have a taxi at the field when we get there, so as not to waste any more time—not, the Lord knows, that I consider the time in Springfield wasted."

"It's too late now, anyway," said Isabel wearily. "It'll be after midnight when we get there, and Uncle Jim goes to bed at half past ten."

"He won't to-night," answered Ronald grimly. "We may be late, but we'll be welcomed."

The home stretch was the dreariest of all. The wind whistled coldly, the stars shone bleakly; Isabel shivered, and slept in little restless naps that gave her unhappy dreams,

and woke to a universe that seemed all darkness.

She was glad when they came to earth at Washington. Yet there, she thought as she looked about at the thick shadows and the blurred arc lights, she had nothing to hope for but worse unhappiness.

Ronald unpacked her tenderly and put her into the waiting cab, and they drove into the quiet city. It was very late now, and the streets were nearly deserted; in dwelling houses here and there the lights still shone, but nearly all the buildings were dark. Isabel looked out listlessly at the familiar scenes.

"Why," she said suddenly, "we aren't on the way to Uncle Jim's. This is Pennsylvania Avenue. Are you sure you gave the driver the right address?"

"I have a little errand at the Bureau first. Don't worry, your uncle will wait for us; I telephoned him."

Isabel shivered again, but said nothing; and they stopped before the massive bulk of the building which houses the Bureau of Mines.

Ronald, jumping out, spoke to the watchman, and was readily admitted; evidently his coming was expected. Isabel sat waiting, her forebodings growing heavier as the minutes passed.

But Ronald, when he reappeared, was visibly elated; he walked fast and exultantly, and gave the Fanrell address to the driver in a jubilant voice.

"Now, then, for the grand finale!" he said, jumping in beside Isabel, and putting his arm close around her. "In just about a jiffy and a half the waiting world is going to be introduced to Mrs. Ronald Sherwood Crewe, the famous flyeuse. Will you give me a kiss now?"

XIX

BUT now it had become a fixed idea with Isabel to sacrifice herself and him to a principle.

"Please, Ronald!" she said, almost tearfully. "You know I'm not free."

He patted her cheek gently. "Never mind, sweet. I've 'bided sae weel for thirty years, I can bide a wee langer yet.' 'Twon't be long, though."

Light still gleamed between the drawn curtains of the Fanrell house when they drew up before it, and Mary, the housemaid, came to the door in answer to their ring.

Her face brightened with astonished pleasure at sight of Isabel, and her lips parted in an exclamation of greeting; but before Isabel could answer, James Fanrell's heavy voice forestalled her from the library.

"Bring 'em in here, Mary," it growled, "and don't stand there gabbling."

Isabel caught a quick breath, and turned to Ronald.

"He's angry already!" she whispered. "Remember—not a word, not a breath, about this afternoon."

"You teach your grandmother to make hooch," returned Ronald tenderly and flipantly; and taking her hand in his, he drew her into the room from which the voice came.

James Fanrell rose as they entered, and stood by his desk, glowering at them. His eyebrows were drawn together, his face flushed and heavy with anger.

"What's this, eh?" he demanded. "What do you mean, Isabel? I send you out to Utah on an errand for me, with your fiancé; and the very minute you ought most to be there, you show up in Washington, with a fellow you picked up on the train! For two cents I'd throw you out into the street!"

Isabel caught a quivering breath, but Ronald interposed before she could speak.

"That's just what I was about to say to you, sir," he remarked in a cool, dispassionate voice. "For two cents—or even less—I'd throw *you* out into the street. You big bully!"

James Fanrell's flushed face turned so deep a crimson that it seemed the blood must burst through the tight-stretched skin. His fists clenched, his eyes grew bloodshot with fury.

"Wha-what's that you s-say?" he stammered. "You puppy! You—you impudent guttersnipe! I'll have you put—put out of every club in town!"

"Oh, no, you won't," returned Ronald. "I'm going to have you put out first—for cheating a dead man, and for terrorizing a child intrusted to your care. I think the first is a felony. Of course the second's worse, but it isn't punishable by law, worse luck."

"Wha-what—what are you — talking about?" choked Fanrell in an almost unrecognizable voice.

"I'm talking about the Chiltern mine, that you got away from Isabel's father by

lies, and draw half your income from now," said Ronald evenly. "It seems you frightened him literally to death by telling him he was selling worthless stock, and then, when you put in the process that made it pay, you kept the whole business from her; she thinks she's been living on your bounty all this time, while really you've been living on hers.

"You needn't try to deny it; I've just been to the Bureau, and got all the statistics down cold—Jove!" he added, his voice growing hot in spite of his tense control, "I think jail's almost too good for you!"

Fanrell slumped into a chair, his empurpled face going suddenly ashen.

"You can't send me to jail," he said hoarsely. "That property's mine by law; he sold it to me of his own free will."

"That's for Isabel to say," returned Ronald. "I think she could sue you for some of the profits, if she wanted to. I'd like to sue you with the toe of my boot."

"Oh, I don't want to sue him!" cried Isabel. "I don't care for anything as long as I have my freedom! I have got my freedom then, haven't I, Uncle Jim?"

"I don't know about that," James Fanrell said with a touch of his old pugnacity. "You're promised to Clint."

"Not now!" exclaimed Isabel blithely. It was astonishing how, all in a minute, fatigue and depression had lifted from her with her fears; she felt as light as a soap bubble. "Clinton swapped me off for a million dollars, of his own free will, just like Esau swapping his blessing for soup."

"And then he didn't get the million,"

added Ronald. "That vanadium's no good; we've bought the stuff in South America."

"What!" exclaimed Fanrell, sitting up, the color returning to his face under the spur of excitement. "You bought the South American beds? For the government? By gosh, that was a near thing for me! I'm certainly glad you had the sense to come home, Isabel. But then—where's Clint?"

At this opportune moment the telephone on the desk rang, with the startling loudness that belongs to all bells of the night, and James Fanrell picked it up. The penetrating voice of the operator came out into the room, so that all three, standing near together as they were, could hear it plainly.

"Western Union. Telegram for James Fanrell, dated Morgan, Utah, April 30:

"Isabel double crossed us, lost papers on purpose to help Crewe. I found them, came here by air, secured vanadium in time to save option. All O. K.

(Signed) 'CLINT.'

Fanrell let the receiver fall from his nerveless fingers, and sank back in his chair. He swallowed twice before he could speak.

"If there is a damn-fool thing that can be done," he said at last huskily, "trust Clint to do it. Lost Isabel and the million too! Lord!"

With an irrepressible chuckle of excitement, Ronald turned and took Isabel in his arms.

"Well," he said, "I know of one option that's expired anyway. I'm going to collect our first kiss, sweetheart."

THE END

A MOTH FLUTTERS TO REST

A MOTH flutters to rest on a pine tree's trunk
And merges its gray wings with the bark
Invisible now— In the valley, hark!
The sound of a cowbell haunts the air,
Tinkling, tinkling as it passes
Like ice being carried along in glasses.

Silence again— The trees without will
Permit the sunlight to hover still
On the same warm spots, awaiting the time
For the thrush to sound his fragile chime.

And I would hide like the moth on the tree
With the earth's colors to cover me,
And waiting—waiting for winds to still
And the earth to hush as the thrushes will—
Beads of song of a delicate hue
I would string on the air for you.

Charles Divine

The Sin Fighter

THIS VERY GOOD MAN WAS JUST ABOUT TO LAND A KNOCK-
OUT ON A GREAT TEMPTATION WHEN THE
REFEREE YELLED "NO CONTEST!"

By Homer Croy

GAYLORD DILTZ came out of his real estate and abstract office in Junction City, took a key from a long chain, locked the door, and started ponderously and pompously down the street. "Ponderously and pompously" are hard words, but only they describe the way Diltz walked. The general impression was as if the statue of Civic Virtue suddenly climbed down from its pedestal and lumbered off to church.

Diltz was the rich man of Junction City. On the window of his office was painted in huge letters, "Gaylord Diltz, Real Estate and Abstracts, Secured Loans"—the last being his real business. He was the official money lender of the town, and when a widow came in he tilted back in his chair, put the tips of his puffy fingers together, and explained that it was customary to give a small bonus to get so much money so quickly.

He was a thick, heavy-set man, especially ponderous about his middle, and wore a cutaway coat. The other business men in Junction City wore ordinary lounge suits, but Diltz stuck to his cutaway.

On Sundays, when he took up the collection, he wore a white vest. If he didn't like the minister, the reverend gentleman might just as well ask the Lord to give him a call somewhere else.

Gaylord Diltz's life had been dedicated to fighting sin, and now as he walked down the street his eyes wandered about in a search for sin. There was never any doubt in his mind as to what sin was.

Sin, in general, was when somebody else was having a good time. Then, of course, it must be stamped out.

That morning, while walking to his office, the good man had seen something

that disturbed his soul. As he passed in front of the Pastime Pool Hall the proprietor was in the door sweeping out.

Diltz liked to smoke a cigar as he walked ponderously to work, but it had gone out, and he stopped in for a light—probably the first time he had ever been in the pool hall.

Here the boys and young men of Junction City smoked and exchanged stories during their idle hours. It was a harmless club for them. The more successful men in Junction City belonged to the Elks Club, or to the Country Club, but such privileges could not be afforded by all.

As Diltz was lighting his cigar, his eyes, always looking for what they could see, had found something that shocked him—pictures of Hollywood bathing beauties which the proprietor had framed and hung up. Each Sunday in the rotogravure sections there were pictures of girls in just as alluring poses and smiling just as enticingly, but as the newspapers were not within the scope of Diltz's power, he gave them no thought.

Now, as he sucked the blaze into his cigar, his eyes fed on the pictures, but he said nothing. After his eyes had got their fill he went down on the street.

He was this afternoon on the way to the ice cream store of Ed Trapp, his brother-in-law. Ed owned a small interest in the pool hall, and Diltz would make Ed tear down the sinful pictures. Then Diltz would feel good all over. Sin would be stamped out.

All his life Diltz had been a sin fighter. When a boy, if a prize was offered for the most faithful attendance at Sunday school, Diltz won it; if one was offered for the student who could repeat the greatest num-

ber of verses from the Bible, Diltz got the little silk ribbon.

When there was a revival in Junction City, the members of the congregation went through the audience asking people to put aside their sinful ways and be saved. Most of the boys in Junction City hated to do this, and had to be shoved into the aisles by their all-knowing parents, but no one had to shove Gaylord Diltz. His rather chubby face flushed with new-found fervor, his cowlick seeming to stand even more erect, he would step into the aisle and go among the people, confidently sorting out the sinners.

Gaylord became known in Junction City as the young man who had never kissed a girl. And it was true. That is, he had never stolen a kiss in the sly, mischievous ways of youth, for he believed that it was wrong.

"Kisses should be kept for marriage," he said. "I wouldn't want to marry the kind of girl who would let me kiss her before we were engaged."

But he liked to play needle's eye, post office, and King William. That was different; people approved of them, hence they were right. He was always the person who suggested these games, and his shouts of merriment led all the others.

Also, he liked art pictures; that is, they were advertised in certain magazines as "art pictures." Now and then, however, the publishers had trouble with the post office.

In his progress down the street, a movement in the window of the Kline store caught his eye, as it was intended to do. Two or three tiny kewpie dolls, with sashes around their waists, gave an imitation of an innocent hula-hula, while a talking machine record revolved beneath them. It was a rather pleasing eye-arrester, and the plump kewpies were attractive — children especially delighted in them.

But Diltz saw nothing amusing. He laid his hand on the doorlatch and ponderously rolled down the aisle.

"I want to speak to you, Kline," he said to the proprietor. "It's about your window display. Don't you think it's too suggestive? Nice people won't come into your store if you're going to flaunt that in their faces."

Kline rubbed his hands uneasily; he could not afford to antagonize the great man.

"I didn't mean anything like that," he explained.

"I know you didn't," Diltz agreed. "That's the reason I spoke to you. I think if I were you I'd take it out. We want to set a little higher standard in Junction City."

And then Diltz rolled down the street. The crusade against sin had had another boost.

II

THE Bon Ton Ice Cream Parlor was partly filled with patrons eating ice cream and drinking soft drinks when Diltz entered. Subconsciously he felt that they shouldn't be there—anything so light and frivolous was wrong. Diltz glanced around.

Genial, hearty, wholesome Ed Trapp was not behind the counter where he usually was, serving up ice cream, cashing purchase checks and keeping things going generally.

Trapp was quite different from Diltz—he had never won a silk ribbon in his life for anything biblical. He knew everybody, liked everybody, and was a great favorite. But he had never made the money that his brother-in-law had.

Diltz could not understand why the relatives of the two sisters—his wife and Trapp's—seemed to like Ed better than they liked him.

"He hasn't a dollar in the bank," he said to Mrs. Diltz. "He doesn't give them anywhere near as nice Christmas presents as I do."

Diltz was suspicious that Ed was not always true to his wife, but he had never been able to find any way in which Ed had gone astray. But he had always been looking and hoping. Some day—

With hardly a glance at the people wasting their time at the tables, Diltz walked back to the rear of the store, where a room served Ed as an office. The door was closed, and inside Diltz could hear voices. Some one was talking to his brother-in-law.

Diltz's first feeling was to walk straight in and make the person wait—everybody in Junction City had to consider Gaylord Diltz, especially Ed Trapp, for Diltz had a mortgage on the store. Some day his brother-in-law would be working for him, he exulted.

Diltz paused. Deep in him was another strain—he liked to "get" things on people; it was good business. Rising on his

toes he crept up the last few feet and silently seated himself in a chair outside the room. If Ed came out, Diltz would merely be waiting until Ed was through.

Diltz heard the murmur of voices. Gradually they became clearer. The visitor, Diltz made out after a few moments, was one of the traveling salesmen who came to Ed to sell desiccated eggs, flavors, and base supplies. It was all about prices, quantities and deliveries—an uninteresting conversation.

Diltz was about to go in—his time could not be wasted—when the conversation turned on a confectioners' convention soon to be held in Chicago.

"You ought to go, Ed," the drummer urged. "It's going to be the best thing the boys have pulled off in some time."

Ed was not sure that he could go; he didn't want to go unless he could take his wife along, and she hadn't been feeling very well.

"When she's feeling down in the dumps she likes to have me with her," he said. "Put me down for the next time."

"Better come," the salesman insisted. "There might be some Chicago ladies there—they like conventions, you know." He laughed. "The men have money, they're away from home and out for a good time. Then the two separate, and that's the end of it."

Diltz's mouth was now open, and his heart thumped. At last! What a wonderful piece of luck!

"Well, if you can't bring the wife along, come alone," the salesman suggested. "It'll do you good. You'll pick up lots of new ideas—besides, you're always the most popular fellow there. Hornbuckle, Bostian & McCoy are going to have a freezing exhibit that'll be the best thing ever shown, and it'll fit right into your proposition here. Not a drop of ammonia—Here's a rough idea of it." The discussion became technical.

"It does sound interesting, if it'll do the business," Ed admitted. "What are they going to sell on—territory or open?"

Again the discussion became involved. Here was something that offered a big chance to Ed Trapp, if he could get the exclusive rights in his district.

Again rising to his tiptoes, Diltz crept away, cleared his throat, and then came walking heavily back. He flung open the door.

"Oh, you got somebody with you. Sorry to interrupt. Go ahead, Ed, I'll wait," he declared genially.

"It's about the Pastime Pool Hall," he said when the drummer had gone. "I dropped in there this morning and they've got a lot of indecent pictures on the wall. Since you've got some money in the hall, I think you ought to tear them down. If you don't—" Pausing, he leaned back in his chair and brought the tips of his fingers together and tapped them slightly. "Well, I think you'd better do it. People aren't going to stand it."

The people, of course, were himself.

"I don't know as it makes much difference one way or the other," Ed said. "I look on such things as safety valves. But if you think they ought to come down, I'll see that they do."

"That's all, Ed—just thought I'd mention it to you. Knew you'd see it in the right light, if somebody called it to your attention. I'll have to be going—want to run over to the church to see if the Sunday school leaflets have come in."

Diltz rolled down the street. Sin had been licked again.

His mind, however, was not on sin rampant in the Pastime Pool Hall. He was thinking of Ed. Many times Diltz had tried to get some bit of evidence which would prove that Ed was vile and contemptible, and now unexpectedly it had come into his hands. The more he thought about his brother-in-law the more indignant he became.

"It's my duty to catch him," he told himself.

III

THE leaflets had not come.

But one of the church women had, and, sitting there alone, Gaylord Diltz had a long talk with her about the work.

"Think of him wanting to slip off when I am his brother-in-law, and the teacher of a Sunday school class, and doing all I can to make women good," he said to himself as he went away, his mind once more returning to Ed.

For several years Diltz had taught the women's Bible class—the best teacher they ever had, they said. He had never taught the men's Bible class. At home he habitually sat in ponderous, wordless gloom, but when he stepped before the class, carefully dressed, his thin hair painstakingly

brushed back, his eyes leaped and his voice vibrated.

"Yes, I'll spend my money and go," he said to himself as he turned away from the Sunday school room. "And him deceiving poor Lora!"

He had never particularly liked Lora, his sister-in-law, but now, when he thought of her, it made his rage rise against Ed. It had always hurt his feelings that Ed's wife was more devoted to Ed than his wife was to himself. And especially when he himself was such a good, just man.

Before she married him, Mrs. Diltz had been "the laughing Thompson girl." She was now a pale, squelched, washed-out woman who rarely smiled. She got tired easily, she had headaches which the doctor couldn't discover the cause of; often she had no appetite.

Sometimes in the evening, when she heard Diltz coming home, she would go upstairs and pretend to be busy.

Intently, during the next days, Diltz watched to see if Ed was going to Chicago to attend the convention. He stopped into the store every day, and brought the conversation around so that it would be easy for Ed to tell him.

Diltz's long years of waiting and suspicions were about to be proved or disproved. Here was a chance for him to run him down—he who had never done anything wrong in his life.

Ed Trapp wanted to go. He wished to know about the new cooling and refrigeration process. If he could apply it to his territory, and serve smaller towns, it would be greatly helpful to him.

At last, Diltz was rewarded.

"They're going to have a confectioners' convention in Chicago next week," Ed said one day. "I've been thinking of going."

Diltz pretended to ask all about the convention and what Ed would learn if he attended.

"A man should keep up with the latest in his business," Diltz finally delivered profoundly. "That is the only way to get ahead."

Now that Ed had decided to go to Chicago, Diltz began ardently to want to be in Chicago at the same time. But to go all the way to Chicago, just to spy on his brother-in-law—that would not be quite right.

At last he thought of Wetzel, owner of the building in Junction City where La

Mode Millinery had its stock. Wetzel lived in Chicago.

"Maybe Wetzel wants to sell the building and I could get the commission," Diltz thought.

The more he thought about the idea, the better it seemed. "The building is getting run down," he told himself. "If he doesn't sell now he'll have a lot of repairs to make. He should be told that. I'll take enough cash with me to tempt him."

"I've got to go on a business trip," Diltz said the day that Ed Trapp was to start to Chicago, but he did not say where he was going. If he were to say that he was going to St. Louis and really did not go there, that would be wrong. It would be a lie.

Instead, he took the train for Kansas City, a point from which it would be easy to go on to Chicago. If people thought that he was going only to Kansas City, it was not his fault. He had told no lie.

When Diltz arrived in Chicago the convention was in full blast; banners were hung along the lobby railings, flags floated. There was a festive air as members, wearing badges with their names printed on little slips, walked up and down the lobby, greeting one another.

Diltz stood guardedly behind a large rubber plant, his heart beating excitedly. The time had come; he would soon know the truth about his brother-in-law. But he could not locate the tall, genial, dashing Ed. He continued to wait, but something had happened to keep Ed from coming.

IV

DILTZ was alone in Chicago, with an evening ahead of him. What should he do? He remembered the musical comedies and the base appeal he had heard they made. He had read about it in the papers, and now and then people from Junction City who had gone to the large cities had told him about the nearly nude ladies.

"I'll go to one just to see how bad it is," he said to himself. "Then I can warn other people to keep away."

He went to a theater ticket agency and stood in the lobby, looking over the large framed photographs of the chorus and the dancing girls.

"I want to pick out the worst," he mused, "so as to know what it is like."

He selected a revue, and after some difficulty was able to buy a seat in the front

row. During the show he sat staring at the thinly clad dancing girls, his mouth open, his eyes going from girl to girl, comparing, estimating. Now and then he moved his tongue over his lips, slightly.

"I think it's terrible," he said to himself when he was again out on the street. "Chicago ought to be ashamed of itself for permitting such a thing. When I get home I can tell my Bible class all about it."

More members had arrived when he got back to the hotel; some had gone to the theater and were now returning. They greeted one another merrily.

Ed was not there, and no one knew Diltz as he walked up and down the glittering corridor, his eyes, as always, moving to the girls. There was a feminine flutter, a quick step, and Diltz had the sense of something nice about to happen to him. And in truth it was as he thought, for a pretty girl wearing a saucy hat was coming toward him.

"Pardon me, are you Mr. Parker?" she asked, and beamed upon him pleasantly, and he had the stimulating sense of faint, intoxicating perfume. "I wasn't quite sure," she added. "It's going to be a big convention, isn't it?"

Diltz's heart thumped. How agreeable it was to have a pretty girl mistake him for somebody else!

In the great temptation of the moment he almost replied that he was the fortunate Mr. Parker, but that would be wrong. That would be a lie.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not," he explained gallantly.

"Oh, I see, you haven't got a badge on," she said. "Of course, how stupid of me!" There was a look of intense disappointment in her eyes. "I hope you won't think I am rude, but I was to meet a gentleman here, and from the description I—I thought it was you." She smiled appealingly. "I'm awfully sorry to bother you."

"No bother at all," he declared even more gallantly.

She floated up the corridor to wait for Mr. Parker.

Diltz had felt tired from his long day, but now it was all forgotten. Suddenly he felt expansive and wished to present himself at his best. Going to the gift shop in the hotel he bought himself a gold-headed cane, such as he had seen other important men carry when serving as escorts to pretty ladies.

"I've always wanted a nice cane," he said to himself.

He walked along the corridors, tapping the cane lightly on the tiles and swinging it with what he conceived to be the proper sweep. He lifted his chest slightly as he moved along the corridors, which had so suddenly become cheery and full of adventure.

He spied the girl, her black eyes still moving over the men, looking for the dastardly Mr. Parker. Diltz ceremoniously removed his hat.

"Have you found him?"

"No, and it's past time," she replied. "He was to take me to supper," she added. "Really, I suppose I should teach him a lesson and not wait any longer."

Suddenly it dawned on Mr. Diltz that there was no Mr. Parker. His heart leaped —how exciting, how stimulating it was! No one would ever know.

Intensely he wanted to take her in to dinner, to the soft lights, the air of luxury—but that would cost money. Rich as he was, he hated to spend it.

He had never been so much tempted in his life. How pretty and charming the girl was!

As he sat on the big corridor lounge, his fingers laced across his stomach, his big round face mounted by thick lens, he looked across at her eagerly, his heart fluttering. He picked up his cane and rolled it between his palms, and watched his golden reflection in its polished head.

"It 'll keep me from getting lonesome," he thought. "Of course it 'll cost me something," he added to himself, "but I suppose I should study such people."

"Wouldn't you like to have a bite to eat with me?" he suddenly heard himself ask aloud.

The girl hesitated. It wouldn't be quite the proper thing to do, but still he looked —well, so kindly and dependable.

They passed into the great dining room with its air of splendor. An orchestra on a little balcony played softly; noiseless waiters stole by.

"It's nice in here," Diltz thought.

He turned to his companion.

"What 'll you have?" he asked with a magnanimous gesture.

She didn't want much, she said. She just liked to sit and listen to the music. Diltz smiled back at her.

"She's nice," he thought.

Now that he was quite sure that she did not mean to eat much, he urged her.

"Order anything you want," he said, and waved his hand at the menu card with its golden crest.

The lady's orders were simple; it was enough just to talk to anybody so charming, her manner said. Diltz hooked his glasses on his nose and looked across at her.

"She's really very pretty," he thought.

"Won't you come up to my room and smoke a cigarette?" she asked after the supper.

Gaylord Diltz's heart pounded, but he knew that would be wrong—to go to her room. Then he thought: "I haven't got anything else to do. I suppose I might just as well go. She's interesting to talk to."

The room was a cozy one, with the lights arranged gracefully. After all, it was pleasant to be in a pretty girl's room, with its little feminine touches so different from a man's. When she was not looking, his eyes moved around appraisingly among her possessions.

"Now tell me about yourself," she said as she sank back on a divan, her knees crossed, one foot swinging slightly.

Suddenly he felt exhilarated—the dinner, the pretty creature opposite him, the slender foot swinging. He began to talk and made himself out a much more important man than he was.

He had just run on from San Francisco to look after some business matters in Chicago—he was in the mining game, he explained. It was pleasant to see the impression he had made upon his young companion.

"Give us a kiss," he said with sudden dare-devility.

The girl arose. It was not right for him to do such a thing. But Diltz was determined—just one little kiss, he said—and bent toward her ponderously. The caress sent his blood dancing.

"That's fine," he panted. "Give us another, dolly."

At that moment there was a knock at the door. The girl freed herself from Diltz's arms, and stared in surprise at the summons.

"Who is it?" she called.

"Just me, darling—Jim," was the answer. "Got back sooner than I expected. I saw the key was out of the box, so I

knew you were in. I thought maybe you'd be thirsty, so I had the boy bring up some ice water."

"Sssh!" the girl whispered to Diltz, and silently pointed to the closet. He crept into it.

When she opened the door Jim entered, and with him the hallboy with the pitcher of water. Putting down his bag, Jim kissed the girl.

"It was ripping to get back," he said. "After all, there was no place like home, however much tipping it takes to live here!" he added humorously as he dismissed the hallboy.

"Hello! What's this?" Jim exclaimed, and picked up the gold-headed cane. Abruptly his laughing pleasantries were gone. "Whose is it?" he demanded fiercely.

The girl hesitated—he mustn't get excited—she had found it in the lobby and was going to turn it in. Jim, now thoroughly enraged, flung open the closet door.

The girl began to cry; she didn't know what had made her do it, she had just lost her head. She clung to Jim, sobbing, pleading; he must hold his terrible temper, especially before the hallboy, who had returned to investigate the raised voices.

V

It was an ordeal. Never had Diltz suffered so. Jim went to the telephone after the hallboy had finally gone—he would have the manager up and find out who this intruder was. Where was he registered from?

Diltz heard the awful words—cur, contemptible cad, trying to break up his home. At last, Jim calmed down. Which did Diltz prefer—exposure or hush money?

"H-how much?" Diltz choked.

"Two thousand dollars."

"Two thousand dollars!" his heart cried within him.

"I won't pay it," he declared.

Jim turned to the telephone.

"I'll have them send up the house detective," he threatened.

Diltz thought of his room with his bag in it; they would find out that he was from Junction City; Ed would hear about it; it would get back home; Mrs. Diltz no longer would cringe like a dutiful wife.

"I'll give you a check," he promised. "My own check."

"No, you don't—you'll give me a certified check." Jim looked Diltz over calmly.

"But I think I'll take cash right now instead," he added.

Diltz protested that he would have to telegraph for it—he never carried much cash with him. "If you do, it's a temptation to spend it," he said, quoting one of his mottoes.

"You get that money at once," Jim ordered coolly.

There was the terrible, devastating, heart-sickening moment when Diltz paid the money over, even though he had beaten Jim down to fifteen hundred dollars.

Immediately Diltz left the hotel. He had kept the young man from finding out anything about him; he was now safe.

The sin fighter did not know that his safety was due entirely to the girl. She had assayed him as a profitable dupe for the badger game, but not of blackmail value.

The following Sunday Gaylord Diltz, dressed in his cutaway, walked ponderously and pompously down the main street of Junction City in the direction of church, his eyes moving restlessly about in a search of sin. It was "Good morning, Mr. Diltz,"

"Nice morning, Mr. Diltz," everywhere as he passed along.

He arrived at the church, placed his hat carefully beside his gold-headed cane, and then took his place before his admiring Sunday school class. His immaculate vest gleamed as he took a deep breath of virtuous enjoyment.

"During the last week I was called to Chicago on a matter of business," he said while expounding the lesson, "and, finding an evening on my hands, I thought I would go in and spend it pleasantly at a musical comedy. But what did I find?"

His eyes closed, his head shook slightly, the tips of his puffy fingers came together. "Shame, open pandering to vice, almost nude dancing girls swaying to lascivious music—" He continued to describe the terrible scene.

At last he finished. "That was what I saw with my own eyes," he declared.

His voice drew down to a whisper, his fist hung in the air.

"Sin! That's what it was." His fist came down on the back of the seat. "Oh, the world is full of it! It must, it shall be stamped out!"

ONE BREEZE-SUNG HEIGHT AND I

THE lane down which you walked
Still blossoms with the feet of you;
The room in which you talked
Still breathes the rosy sweet of you;
The wicker where you leaned
Still whispers with the heat of you—
The tender flame of spring
That flowed from you, though fall
Was not designed to bring
That gentle warmth at all.

Autumn was given to man
To serve as silhouette
Of what no longer can
Be his in full face; yet
The floor whereon you danced
Still vibrates with the swing of you,
The happy waves that chanced
To clasp you bear the cling of you;
One breeze-sung height, entranced,
And I forever sing of you!

Richard Butler Glaenzer

Charley Twists the Compass

THE STORY OF A BUCKEYE YOUTH WHO DID NOT SEE WHY
THE WILD WEST SHOULD MONOPOLIZE ALL THE
THRILLS OF RANGE WARFARE

By Fairfax Downey

THE rocking-chair on which Charley Halverson had been loping without covering more than eight or ten inches of his farmhouse porch slid to a sudden stop as he leaned back in its seat. It was as if a trusty cayuse had been pulled back on his haunches by his two-fisted rider. Not even the Ohio sunset glowed more vividly than Charley's brown eyes, which seemed about to start from his round, pleasant face and meet the magazine he clutched before him halfway.

The cover of the periodical displayed a mounted cowboy in three colors. In his hands were a brace of six-guns, which to his enemies must have seemed fairly to leap from their holsters.

No man to be left behind by swift action in fiction, Charley read rapidly. His sturdy legs braced themselves, his slightly stocky body stiffened, and his work-toughened fingers crumpled the pages. His breath came faster, his arms jerked. Ah, guns were speaking now! The sharp cracks of rifles were ringing out. Whew, hot work this! The reader's mouth was parched, and drops of sweat beaded his brow.

At last he relaxed. The hero had won that chapter's fight, anyway — you could tell it by Charley's grin.

He caught a glimpse of his reflection in a window-pane. His jaw was grimly set. He wished Elsie Emmett, in there visiting with his grandmother, would look out and see it that way. That was the way she liked it. He made much better time with her when he was still under the influence of a bang-up Western story.

Right now there was iron in his soul. He could have ridden boot to boot with his brother Will, who had sold out his share of the farm and was out West. He could have

led him through just such a war between cattlemen and sheepmen as the story he had been reading narrated. He could have shot it out in a fracas with rustlers. He could have swung a big round-up of wild steers—yes, sir, even wild steers, although he never had much cared for the idea of wild steers since a plenty wild enough bull had helped him over a fence in his youth.

Charley's gaze traveled back from his gate, which opened on the State road, to the magazine, and thence to the glories of the open range. Nothing daunted by the shooting scrape in the previous chapter, those unscrupulous sheep herders were at it again, trying to sneak their miserable charges into a fine old cattle country. They would stop at nothing to attain their aims, those fellows. Charley Halverson and the hero realized it at the same time. Thrilling at the show-down, Charley snapped out the printed defiance of *Slim Sanders* in a voice like cold steel:

"I'll run you lousy sheepmen off this hyah range if I have to fill you-all plumb full o' lead!"

"How's that? What you saying?"

Gruffly indignant tones broke through Charley's abstraction and in a jiffy brought him back hundreds of miles to Ohio.

At the edge of the porch stood Micah Emmett, his neighbor. There were rather cogent reasons why he should take exception to the sentiments just expressed. He owned one of the largest flocks of sheep in the county.

The seamed, leathery countenance of the visitor was set in ominous wrinkles—such of it as was not concealed by the sandy gray beard which, some people said, was one of the few real labor saving devices on the Emmett farm.

"What's that I heard you calling me?" he demanded.

Charley scrambled up out of his rocker, flushing.

"Aw, say, Mr. Emmett," he protested, "I wasn't calling you anything!"

Mr. Emmett not only glared his disbelief, but announced it in plain talk.

"You weren't, weren't you? Young man, I know you don't like my sheep. Broke through your fences a couple of times, maybe. Didn't do no harm to speak of, but you hold hard feelings. 'Tain't neighborlike of you. Now I come over and hear you muttering about taking a gun to me—me an old friend of your pa's, too! He'd have something to say to you, if he was alive. I don't know what you young fellers nowadays is coming to. Violent, lawless—"

Charley broke into the tirade desperately.

"I just read that out of this magazine—honest, Mr. Emmett."

"You did, eh? Well, you ought to leave reading like that alone. It's vicious. Leads to crime, it does. I s'pose the next piece in the magazine is about wild women and high-powered cars and night life in the great city, huh? Bad business, bad business! Makes it hard to keep hands. They all quit and go to working in the factories in Akron. I thought better of you, Charley!"

"I'll throw the magazine away," Charley promised—and that was nobly offered, with that last chapter unread.

Old Micah was mollified. He settled himself in a chair.

"What I come over here to talk to you about was those lots, boy," he said affably. "Tied up the way they are, we're both losing summer grazing and good money on 'em. Course, it wasn't much of a disagreement I had with your pa's estate over 'em, but I had to take it to law to clear it up. Case may be decided next week, may be decided next year. Meantime you and I might as well divide up the pasture temporary. Let's fence off the best stand of the timber and turn our stock into the rest. What do you say, Charley?"

The host lowered his eyes to hide the twinkle in them. The proposition was a lopsided one. Micah Emmett's reputation for laziness was enough to assure who would do the fencing; and his three hundred sheep were likely to get more of the

grazing than the Halverson herd of fifty head of cattle. The old man must be growing pessimistic about the outcome of the suit, Charley decided, and wanted to get what value he could out of the wood lots before it went against him.

"Seems to me we might as well wait for the judgment," he answered diplomatically. "Won't be long, likely."

"Now, boy, take good advice when you hear it. I'm old enough to be your pa. I was farming before you were born. You pulled through the corn market slump right well, putting in this dairy of yours and feeding surplus. I won't say it weren't smart of you, even if it did take my daughter Elsie to persuade you into it; but you can't feed cows nothing but corn. You need pasture."

"I've got some."

"'Tain't enough." The seams in the Emmett visage deepened threateningly. "You ought to have better sense 'n to waste good grazing, boy!"

"I don't like sheep, Mr. Emmett. They"—Charley quoted directly from a Western novelette he had recently read—"tear up grass by the roots. I think probably my brother Will, ranching out West, is having trouble with 'em. They ruin a good cattle country, you know."

"They do like thunder!"

"Yes, they do," Charley maintained stoutly, sitting up alertly in his chair, his eyes glowing. "Why, time and time again sheep have been sneaked into some cattle range, often by a pretty dastardly trick, and it meant ruin for the cowmen, I tell you. Along would come some accomplice, pretending he was a squatter or something, and take up some land, and before the cattlemen knew it the grand, open range would be all spoiled and fenced in. Gosh, it was heartbreaking! There was no getting those sheepmen out, either, once they got their woolies in. There was nothing for the cowboys to do but pile on their cayuses and ride westward, ever westward."

Micah Emmett's mouth, which had gaped during this eloquent dissertation, clamped suddenly with a snap.

"What sort of crazy rot is this you're talking?" he exploded. "Say, young man, you can go ride ever westward straight to—"

"Why, father!"

The trim little figure of Elsie Emmett appeared in the doorway. A gentle beam

of the setting sun made her hair match the glistening of the gilt weather vane on the barn. It brought out the surprise in her big brown eyes, too, and gave Charley a splendid chance to count the fascinating freckles on her dainty little nose. He had never got beyond seven yet. The matter needed a closer inspection than a bashful man could give.

"What in the world are you two saying?" the girl demanded.

Charley loved that "you two." He often tried to get her to say "oo" syllables. They made her purse her lips so irresistibly that a fellow might almost dare, might almost—

"This young fool's been insulting me!" the angry voice of Micah Emmett broke in on the youth's fond imagining.

A tiny frown gathered on Elsie's smooth brow. Charley saw it and turned pale. How near he had come to having a serious run-in with her father! Elsie was worth all kinds of concessions, and some thought highly of her sister Edna, too. Folks said that the girls were all Micah ever had raised on his farm that could take State fair prizes, and that the late Mrs. Emmett deserved most of the credit for them.

"Scuse me, Mr. Emmett. Guess I was just talking," Charley hastily apologized.

Elsie's tiny frown gave way to a more than tiny sigh. Would this boy never show any nerve, always back down? How could a girl be happy with a jellyfish?

"Well, let it pass," Micah conceded grandly. "Now about these wood lots."

Whereupon he proceeded to detail his plan, which was a heads-I-win-tails-you-lose proposition, as his young neighbor had anticipated. When he finished, Charley burst into peals of laughter. He knew he ought not to, but he just couldn't help it. He laughed so hard that tears blinded him. When he could see again, he became aware that he was about to play Pompeii to his neighbor's Mount Vesuvius.

"You young fool!" Micah shouted. "Quit that braying!"

"You were joking with me, weren't you, Mr. Emmett?" Charley asked weakly.

"Joking nothing!"

"If you weren't, then you must think I'm pretty simple."

"Think it? Hell, I know it!"

The Halverson backbone, ordinarily a mild, purely osseous structure, had received an infusion of iron. The two men faced

each other on the porch, their faces red, their voices pitched high.

"You keep your tick-infested sheep off those lots!" Charley shouted.

"You bet I will!" Micah roared. "I wouldn't have 'em mix with them grub-eaten scrub cows of yours for a mint of money!"

Charley could see he was going to be outcursed. He had never had a gift that way. There was *Slim Sanders*, now, in that Western story. *Slim* wasn't any hand for argufying. He said so himself every chapter or so. *Slim's* way was to let a sheepman go for his gun and then beat him to the draw; but when his enemies were too craven to shoot it out, *Slim* could hurl a pretty strong defiance. That one at the end of Chapter VI, for instance.

"You old sheep-dip swilling son of a gun!" Charley heard himself burst out. "You've gone too far this time, damn you! I figure to ride herd on this hyah range long as there's a single beef critter left in the State. Let jest one o' your woolies stray 'cross the line, and it won't be fit for mint sauce!"

A startled little gasp came from Elsie, and both of the men jumped. They had forgotten her presence.

While Micah sputtered inarticulately, so mad he couldn't speak, Charley rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes. What had he said? He hardly knew, but he was moderately sure that he had cussed Elsie's father clean off the map.

He risked a glance at her. She was leaning toward him, her lips were parted, and there was something shining in her eyes which could not have been the sun, for that luminary had set. Charley felt for his jaw. Gosh, it was grimly set! It came to him suddenly that he would not be the first cattleman to win the love of a sheepman's daughter by a courageous stand against heavy odds.

Micah was about to manage to say something, but Charley turned on him savagely and barked:

"It's onhealthy for you and your kind around here in a white man's cattle country. Now, 'fore I let some daylight plumb through you, git!"

The minute he had said it he was sorry. That was going a bit strong; and the phrase "you and your kind" was unfortunate.

Elsie's little freckled nose went up in the air. Taking the arm of her protesting

parent, she led him grandly off down the road with never a backward glance.

II

THE sultry summer evening crowded the Sagerstown drug store to capacity. Business at the fountain was excellent, and the two great globular containers of bright-hued fluids in the window winked like the blue and purple eyes of some jovial ogre. The headlights of the small cars lining the curbs winked impudently back.

Summer, however, was far from getting all the credit for trade from Frank Sagers, the proprietor. He knew full well that his store was flourishing in its rôle of modern forum, and that a neighborhood quarrel had filled it with friends and Ohioan countermen who were lending their ears for all they were worth.

A neighborhood quarrel — you couldn't beat it! Frank had read of that evolution jangle down in Tennessee, and had been a bit jealous; but now his spirit was tranquil. Let 'em have their monkeys! Frank was content with the local Halverson *versus* Emmett controversy.

The store hummed with conversation. The fact that Elsie and Edna Emmett occupied a table with Hank Cutler, foreman at Halverson's place, was a grand fillip to interest. Frank gratefully instructed that the party should have an extra gob of ice cream and an extra squirt of sirup every time they ordered a sundae or a soda. If only Charley Halverson would happen in! Gosh, the fountain would sell out!

But Charley was bound for the movies that evening. A pretty steady fan, Charley. Almost every time the picture changed, you would see his car outside of the Idylhour; but when he rode up that night he somewhat awkwardly climbed down from a horse. Finding the old hitching rack, for which mighty few people ever had use in these days, he tied up his steed — an animal of super-broncho proportions — and clanked up to the garishly lit front of the movie theater.

The bright lights revealed a somewhat novel apparition. Charley's clothes were by no means of the store variety. There were spurs on his odd-looking boots, the heels of which had been built up. His shirt was a robin's egg blue, his necktie orange. His felt hat had been tortured into a queer shape. He carried a quirt and rolled a little as he walked.

Swiftly an expression of disgust spread over his features. A society drama was the show that night. Charley swore. Why couldn't they put on more good Westerns? Such a silly exhibition would get no support from him. He made for the drug store.

Charley rather liked the stir his entrance caused, although he fancied his poker face showed nothing of his emotions; but he could not hold it frozen when he saw the Emmett girls at a table with Hank Cutler.

For three weeks of feud he had not set eyes on Elsie. He realized with a pang that he had missed her. He remembered how like corn silk in the sun he had always thought her hair. He would bet it was as soft, too. Some thought Edna pretty, but she was too skinny.

Elsie's dress, too, became her small, rounded self so well! Charley wondered if her little freckled nose would turn up even more at him, and if those wide brown eyes would snap at the sight of him. He wouldn't be surprised, he reflected sadly.

With a long, lank arm Hank Cutler was beckoning him over to their table. Charley hesitated. Then, with a look around which had in it something of the daring and defiance of the plainsman, he strode over.

After nonchalantly stopping on the way to buy the new Western magazines on the counter, he arrived, and the girls made room for him. To be sure, they were not cordial, but they did condescend to know him. There was even a glint of tenderness in Elsie's eyes. He ordered a round of sodas.

"Charley, why were you so nasty to daddy?" Elsie asked in her direct way.

"He forced me to it, Elsie," Charley explained earnestly.

"You must have talked pretty mean to him," said Edna.

Her tones were gracious. Edna was enjoying this chance to bask in the public notice.

Charley stated his case sturdily, with a swing to his words, and a tang of the West. Elsie liked the way his jaw squared, the way his eyes narrowed grimly, the way he pounded the table till the sundae cups rattled. This was a new Charley.

"We can't stand for sheep on our land, us cattlemen can't," Charley maintained.

"We're really dairymen, Charley," Hank Cutler interposed.

"I say cattlemen!" Charley glared.

"All right, boss," conceded the lanky foreman.

"Your pa tried to put across a deal on me that would give him all the profit and me all the work," Charley continued.

The girls made no reply to this charge. Elsie need not have heard it to believe it. They had had plenty of experience with Micah.

"I can't be mad at you, Charley," Elsie declared sweetly. "I think you've really done something for us. You got daddy raging, and it's good for him. It's given him real energy. He's done more around the farm in these last three weeks than he has for years."

"He has, at that," Edna corroborated.

"He says he's going to show you what's what," Elsie went on. "Why, he's given up raising just for wool. Now he's raising for mutton, too, just as we've tried to persuade him for a long time. We're going to stock some Southdowns."

"More sheep, hey?" An innate antagonism swelled in Charley's bosom. "Guess he'll be wanting more grazing now. Guess he'll want to run 'em over the whole country!"

"Don't be silly, Charley!"

"I'm not silly."

"You are, too."

"You're stingy with your old wood lots," contributed Edna, her partisan spirit beginning to kindle.

"My daddy isn't going to take any more than his rights," declared Edna, family loyalty flaming within her.

Hitherto the assemblage in the Sagers-town drug store had been listening with a polite air of indifference. This was completely abandoned now. The whole forum was giving ear.

Charley indicated mistrust of the ethics of sheepmen. "I'm a cowman, and my word is as good as my bond," he declared heatedly. "I'm proud to say—"

"We're certainly proud of having nice sheep on our farm," Elsie interrupted. Her color was high, and she was distractingly pretty.

"Now, boss," Hank Cutler said soothingly, "you oughtn't to argue with the ladies. I don't think Mr. Emmett 'll let his sheep break through our fences no more, even if he does stock more of 'em. I—"

"Who asked you to horn in?" Charley demanded coldly.

"Well, boss—"

"That's enough from you, Cutler!"

"Don't you mind him, Hank," Elsie cried.

"Boss, as Elsie says, their sheep are—"

Charley Halverson's chair grated back, and he rose from the table, sweeping up his pile of magazines. Every eye in the crowded store focused on him, and most of them remarked his resemblance to the figure of the dashing cowboy on the cover of the outer magazine.

Charley's lips were a thin straight line, but through his mind ran the burning thought:

"It's always the traitorous foreman, in love with the rival rancher's daughter, who sells out the cattlemen to the sheep herd-ers!"

A buzz ran from one table to another. An ominous bulge had been noted in young Halverson's right hip pocket. It might be a revolver—as Charley had considered when he rolled up two handkerchiefs and arranged them in that pocket.

With a rattle of spurs, he stalked over to the fountain, after doffing his hat with a flourish to the Emmett girls, but with never a suspicion of a smile in their direction. He ordered a drink and tossed it off.

Absently he ordered another, and reached for it when it came, to fling it down the path of its predecessor; but you simply cannot toss off a banana split.

With a muttered oath, Charley flung out of the door. He untied his steed, mounted, and savagely dug spurs into its flanks.

Often Charley had stepped on the accelerator of his car, and then, at will, reduced the speed; but his somewhat unaccustomed cayuse did not work that way. With the bit in its teeth, the "bronc" maintained its dead gallop for home.

Clear of town, Charley had thought to walk his mount. The countryside was to have heard the mournful notes of "The Cowboy's Lament"; but all that the countryside heard that night was "Whoa! Whoa!"

III

It was a standing joke among the hands on the Halverson farm that about the only close contact the boss had with his own live stock was at dehorning time. While two of his men held down a lusty black and white Holstein-Friesian calf, Charley would rub caustic potash into its poll until it had about as much chance of sprouting

horns as a pig has of acquiring side pockets. Several times his zeal has caused him burned hands; whereat his men would snicker behind his back and remark that the boss was all for safety first with his cattle.

They liked Charley, however, and he had good men on the farm. The dinner horn on the Halverson place had never been blighted, and when it blew it meant something, for Charley knew the wisdom of a good table.

Once he had tried to supplant the dinner horn. He had suggested to his grandmother that she should announce meals by stepping to the door and calling in true Western style:

"Chuck's ready—come an' git it!"

But she had refused, and that was that.

Charley left the actual management of his cows in the capable hands of Hank Cutler. In their pedigrees, in their feed, in butter fat tests, in marketing—in fact, in all the important details of scientific dairying, the boss was assiduous and well advanced; but all his activities were at least once removed from the bovine basis thereof. He needed Hank, and he knew it. That was why he retained his foreman in spite of a mistrust and jealousy which had grown rapidly since that night in the drug store.

As for Hank, he displayed a very fair semblance of loyalty. He had backed his employer on the day when the Emmett sheep broke through the fence again, and had helped him herd them back. Hank had defended some new cows that he had been bringing out from town from the assaults of two dogs who rushed out from the Emmett place. The only protests he had made were against the herding methods that Charley had begun to favor.

"Boss, we can get the cows out to pasture without a couple of the hands doing rough riding around 'em," Hank had argued. "The boy used to do it all right. There ain't no call for setting a guard around 'em. Micah Emmett ain't coming over on your land to pester 'em."

"Best to take precautions, when there's trouble on," Charley insisted.

"We're getting more precautions and less milk," Hank pointed out. This Charley could not deny. "You know I'm all for good care of the stock, boss," Hank asserted. "We've gone and proved it's worth it. It's being proved over at Em-

mett's, too. The old man's quitting his shiftless ways, and it's paying him already."

Charley would listen to no more about sheepmen. He turned and walked away. After that, he would not listen to as much; for that night he noted Hank slicking up, and saw him depart in the direction of the Emmett farm.

"It's coming to a show-down," Charley muttered to himself, "and it's coming quick!"

Even his Western magazines were beginning to pall on him. Why, he was living in the very midst of a cattlemen's and sheepmen's war himself!

Then came the afternoon when the show-down showed up.

Hank, who had been over at the county seat, brought word that the litigation over the wood lots was due to be decided that day. He had not been able to wait for the verdict, however. It was a moot question whether the disputed land would go to Emmett or to Halverson.

The news galvanized Charley into sudden action. The only thing he had in the way of a shooting iron was a shotgun, but he did not regret the lack. Gun play, thrilling as it was, was best left in print. Charley had a wholesome fear of the results it might bring about in Ohio. Anyway, he had been brought up on fists. It was to those primitive weapons that *Slim Sanders* had resorted that time when the greasers trapped him unarmed in the adobe *ranchero*.

"Hank," he ordered, "we'll herd our cattle into the wood lots right now!"

Possession is nine points of the law—in such matters, anyhow. Why hadn't he thought of that before?

Hank was aghast.

"But, boss—" he began to protest.

"You heard me, Cutler. Are you backing down on me?"

"No, I ain't. Do you want 'em all in there?" Hank asked resignedly.

"Of course!"

"The bull, too, boss?"

"Well"—Charley hesitated, then spoke firmly—"well, I said all of 'em, but run a strong length of rope through his nose ring, and have two of the men hang on."

So, headed by the grimly determined boss, the Halverson dairy herd moved on the wood lots, its hoofs thumping along the side road and raising a great cloud of

dust. Charley was the first to see another cloud of dust advancing from the direction of the Emmett farm. It was a much bigger cloud, and before long it was identified by the sound of multitudinous bleatings. The sheepmen were coming to meet him in the open at last!

Charley tightened his belt and marched on. He and his column were there first, with time to spare. Opening the gate, he strode in and waited. A scant hundred yards across a narrow neck of the lot was a second gate. Along the road leading to it came the sheepmen.

Charley's heart raced wildly, and he tingled all over. If only he could trust Hank Cutler, on whom he should be able to count as his right-hand man in this fracas! Well, there was time for a minor showdown before the big one. *Slim Sanders* had never tolerated an enemy at his back.

"Cutler!" Charley motioned him up. "Are you with me or agin me?"

"Boss," replied Hank, and his honest brown face wrinkled up comically, "you may be crazy, but I'm with you every time."

"But Elsie," Charley persisted mercilessly. "How about your girl?"

"You've got another think coming, boss," Hank declared. "It's Edna I'm sweet on."

Charley grinned. Then he had to wink his eyes. His right hand met Hank's in what he recognized at once as a grip of steel. Even as far east as Ohio, men were men!

Now the sheepmen were at the opposite gate, a torrent of wool rolling up at their heels. Old Micah thrust through the gate. With him were Elsie and Edna and all the Emmett hands.

"Get out of there, Halverson!" Micah shouted. "I just got a phone message that the judge decided for me. Now get out!"

"Where's your proof?" Charley demanded.

"You'd better believe my daddy!" Elsie called.

The old sinking feeling gripped Charley. This was bitterly humiliating; but there seemed to be nothing for it but ignominious retreat.

Then from the Emmett forces came a taunting yelp:

"Yah, yuh drug store cowboy! Go on home!"

It was Marv Green. Marv was one of the huskiest hands in the county—an ideal sheepman with whom to engage in a long-range rifle duel, Charley had thought when he had read his last cowboy story.

Charley clenched his fists. He saw Marv Green double up a pair that were positively hamlike. The sight rooted him to the spot, and even the pathetic, shamed way in which Elsie's head drooped did not seem to move him.

Just then, from close behind him, there came a fierce bellow and the sound of approaching hoofbeats. Charley did not even wait to turn his head. He knew that when a bull is after a man, there is no time to do so. The fear of his youth flooded back over his consciousness with a nerve shattering rush. He uttered one mighty whoop and charged away from there—straight for Marv, as it happened. The runner appeared to be reaching rearward for a gun.

One look at the stocky cyclone bearing down on him, and Marv spun about, hurdled the fence, and sprinted for home. Micah and the other hands yelled, and the girls screamed, but they did not join in the retreat.

Then Charley risked a glance over his shoulder. A man on horseback occupied the spot in the field where he had stood. As for the bull, he had not moved from his safe anchorage behind the fence.

His pallor giving way to a flush of triumph, Charley brought up beside Elsie. Old Micah had no business to interrupt the young man's preoccupation. One doesn't see a girl's eyes shine so every day.

"Ha, ha!" Micah cackled. "You sure run Marv off! I didn't think you had it in you, Charley. I didn't get to tell you awhile back, boy, that the judge gave you the upper half of these lots."

Elsie laid a soft little hand on Charley's arm. The thrill that ran through him told him that he would never have trouble getting started again. He could give up West-erns for love stories now.

"Why, isn't this your brother Will riding up?" Elsie asked.

"Yep, it's me," acknowledged the horseman, dismounting. "Back from the West for a little visit. Thought I might stay East, Charley, and buy in with you here again, but I've changed my mind. I'm going back West, folks. It's a whole lot quieter there!"

The Jawbone of an Ass

SHOULD A MAN GIVE HIMSELF UP AS A FAILURE IN LIFE JUST
BECAUSE HE HAS A RECEDING CHIN?

By Frances Kane and Charles Beahan

BILL WADE was a very firm young man. No woman could make a fool of him; so the minute the tennis match was over he told Lilla, quite regretfully, that he had remembered an important business appointment, and would have to run for the next train to town.

There was a murmur of polite surprise from the crowd. They were all going down to congratulate Henry Lindstrom on his victory, and afterward there would be a party in celebration; but Bill had sat all afternoon and watched the ecstatic look on Lilla's face as her eyes followed the swift, beautiful playing of Lindstrom, the young Swede whom she had been lionizing ever since he had won the club tennis championship. Bill had had enough of Henry.

He was sorry for the hurt look in Lilla's eyes, but she had deliberately broken her appointment with him, and had spoiled his plans for the day by dragging him out here to watch Henry's triumph. With brisk determination he shook hands with the crowd, and was suddenly glad when he saw that Lilla was reluctant to let him go. That was the way to handle Lilla!

On the train he thought with relief of the party he had escaped. Bill, whose quiet self-confidence had won him the respect of the big men in his own business world, felt like a gawky freshman with Lilla's fast-traveling, hard-drinking, careless-tongued young set. Not that he had ever let her suspect it; but he chose to avoid the contrast whenever possible.

Very soon after he met Lilla, Bill had come to two conclusions—that his life without her would be empty, and that the greatest obstacle he would have to overcome in convincing her of this would be her friends. In holding himself aloof from them, he knew, lay his best chance.

Nevertheless, he faced a long, empty evening with the realization that he was completely at a loss as to what to do. For ten years, from the day when Bill Wade started checking pay rolls for a building construction company to the time when the William H. Wade Construction Company stood proudly on its own feet and put in bids with the best of them, Bill had given all his time and strength and energy to his work. During the last year, when, for the first time, he had found himself with some leisure, Lilla had pleasantly and efficiently disposed of all his spare time—and she was a great playfellow! She could unerringly pick the right play, she knew the amusing places to go and the interesting things to do.

At home, the Sunday papers were stacked on the arm of his chair, and Bill settled himself to an evening of reading. Strange, how little there was of interest when one really had the time to read! The magazine section, with its luridly colored pictures, caught his eye. "Great Murders of All Times"—who ever dug up these things? Here was the story of a bogus count who had married four fortunes in as many years. Here was a chap named J. Huxley Buxbaum writing a series of articles on "Types of Men I Have Met." That was interesting.

It seemed that you could tell a chap's ability by the size and shape of his features. Chins were particularly important—a great deal depended on the shape of a man's chin. Bill thought of the men he knew, and tried to remember what their chins were like. Practically all the great men one had ever heard of had large, square jaws.

There were pictures of Napoleon, Lincoln, Roosevelt. All their success, Mr.

Buxbaum felt, was directly due to their chins. And then there were the notorious-ly weak characters with small, receding chins. J. Huxley Buxbaum was on terms of the utmost intimacy with the chins of murderers, blackmailers, bigamists. All damned by their chins!

Bill had never thought about it before. The thing took hold of his imagination. He thought of Lilla's chin—broad at the base, firm, the jaws almost squared off. No wonder she ruled her own set with an iron hand!

Almost unconsciously his hand went to his own jaw—and dropped. These silly, driveling articles! He pushed the paper away impatiently. The conviction of his own forcefulness, his intrepidity, was part of Bill's religion; and yet, no doubt about it, his chin was sadly lacking in quantity. He had never noticed it before, but now, standing before the mirror, he saw that it distinctly resembled the chins of those awful examples whose pictures decorated the page he had just pushed aside.

Well, it couldn't be helped, and there was no use getting worried about it. This came of being left to his own devices!

II

BILL awoke the next morning with a curious feeling of depression. His usual relish for the business of the day, his sense of competency for whatever it might present, were lacking. Something had been knocked out of the very foundations of his character—the thing which had always been at the bottom of his consciousness, and from which had sprung his sure, quick decisions, his love of battle, his success; and, although he was scarcely aware of it, that thing had been knocked out by J. Huxley Buxbaum.

His glance fell on a picture of Lilla on his dresser. How pretty she was! Had he been a fool to let her go to the party with that Swede yesterday? Certainly he had spent a miserable evening; and what, exactly, had he gained?

Bill began to have the strongest doubts of the wisdom of his course where Lilla was concerned. She did have the firmest chin!

In the subway he remembered J. Huxley Buxbaum again, and looked around with interest at the other passengers. Opposite him was a chin that would have delighted the heart of J. Huxley. Lucky chap! Probably be a millionaire some day.

Then there were a couple of poor devils with mere excuses for chins. Clerks and bookkeepers, probably—would be, too, till the end of their days. There was another one of the chosen—a man with a chin like that looked positively out of place in the subway. He should be riding in his own limousine. Must be a bank president, at least. Bill sank his own chin into his coat collar and allowed himself to feel altogether dismal and depressed.

The employees of the Wade Construction Company were startled and annoyed when Bill quietly opened the door and walked through the offices to his own room. Never before had they failed to hear the ring of his steps as he swung down the corridor—their signal to start the day's work. Typewriter keys began to click, the drafts-men leaned earnestly over their blue prints, the phone operator quickly slid into a drawer the powder box and mirror that had been receiving her undivided attention, and devoted herself to the switchboard.

It was still a little before nine o'clock, but a guilty feeling hung over the office. Bill, in his room, sensed it, and it added to his gloom. He had always been proud of his office force. They were a steady, hard-working bunch, and many of them had been with the Wade Construction Company since its beginning. They could be relied on to work faithfully without supervision from him; but suddenly Bill wondered what they actually thought of him.

Was he really the head of a loyal little business family, as he had fondly imagined himself to be? Or had they been laughing at him behind his back—calling him an easy mark? It was a new thought for Bill, and he made himself very unhappy over it.

He picked up the morning's mail, and the first letter deepened his sense of injury. So the McNaulty Company had beat him to the Belvidere Hotel job! He had learned from what he regarded as a sure source that his bid was the lowest, and that few of the other bidders were willing to undertake the time limit which Bill had felt confident he could meet. He might have known, though, with McNaulty in the field! This was the biggest job of the year, and when McNaulty went after a contract every other bid was merely a formality.

Lawrence McNaulty was the biggest man in the building trades—one of the most powerful in America. Starting as an

immigrant Irish bricklayer, he had built up a great fortune and a name that had become a terror to construction men. In these days there were few who ever saw him, but he hung over the building world as an aviator hangs over a city, and the bombs he threw were subcontracts that made or broke the smaller men at his will. All acknowledged his power, and contractors said their prayers to God and Lawrence McNaulty.

Bill Wade knew by heart every detail of the career of this great man, and it was the name of McNaulty that had fired him with ambition since the days when he had bent over the checking of pay rolls. It was no disgrace to lose to McNaulty. Bill shrugged and tossed the notice aside.

The name "McNaulty Company" on another letter in the stack on his desk drew his eye. It was a short, formal note, and Bill read it through twice before he grasped that the board of directors of the McNaulty Company would appreciate his presence at a meeting that morning in regard to the contract for the Belvidere Hotel, just awarded to them.

The meeting was set for half past ten, and Bill had just time to make it. In the cab, his spirits rose. This was hobnobbing with the great! No use trying to guess what was coming, but whatever it was they would find him ready. Bill felt his old courage, his sense of power, returning.

There was a ten-minute wait in an impressive, oak-paneled reception room. There were two Bill Wades waiting—one weak-chinned, uncertain, doubting himself, awed by the magnificence of McNaulty; the other was the old Bill, vigorous, sure, telling himself that he was the equal of any of these men, reminding himself of the board meetings he had faced and won over to his side, of the difficult situations he had mastered.

Finally a bell rang and he was ushered in. He saw an enormous room with a long table in the center, around which sat ten men. Most of them were elderly and distinguished-looking. Three or four had the outdoor, bluff look of men who had served their time as outside superintendents. Much of Bill's success had been wrested from just such men as these. He possessed the ability to "sell himself" to them before he had uttered a word, and the rest was always easy.

He felt alert and self-confident as his

eyes traveled quickly up the table to the head; and there they rested on a chin. That was all Bill saw, but it was the chin of chins—massive, protruding, blue-black. Ye gods, what a chin!

Bill's gaze hung, fascinated. This was the chin that J. Huxley Buxbaum had called invincible. Its owner was a leader of men—unbeatable. Bill felt his carefully nursed self-confidence ebb. He could think of nothing but that chin!

Hazily he heard the names of the members of the board as he was presented to them. A chair was pushed forward, and he sank into it. He made an effort to concentrate, but it was five minutes before he gathered what was being said.

The McNaulty Company, it appeared, had so much work on hand that it could not see its way clear to undertake the Belvidere and have it finished on time. It had decided, therefore, not to do the actual job, although, of course, the McNaulty name must appear on so important a building. The Wade Construction Company had put in the lowest bid, and had guaranteed to meet the time clause. Therefore, if the Wade Company cared to take on the job, an agreement could be made between the two companies whereby they would split the profit.

Bill listened intently while the terms of the deal were outlined. This, he realized, was the great moment of his career. He, Bill Wade, was to be associated with these men, all far older and far wiser than he; and through them he would actually be associated with the great Lawrence McNaulty himself. The McNaulty Company was responsible for many of the finest and most notable structures in the country, while he—well, only eight years stood between him and a time checker's job!

It was the new Bill, doubting his own power, conscious of his insufficient lower jaw, who was foremost now. He wanted to get up and thank these gentlemen for the honor conferred on him, but the thought of facing the chin at the head of the table kept him in his seat. He knew that the members of the board must be disappointed in him. Probably they were regretting their decision already.

An elderly man at his left was asking him to outline to them briefly his plan of procedure on the building. Bill rose rather shakily and began to name the subcontractors whom he would intrust with the work.

They were men with whom he had always done business. He knew what they would do for him, and his voice became more confident as he mentioned their names.

A chair was shoved back and the chin rose.

"I believe it will be preferable for Mr. Wade to distribute the contracts to our own subcontractors," said its owner. "They are, of course, the best in the city. Do you gentlemen agree that the McNaulty Company should pass on all subs for the Belvidere?"

There was general assent. Bill's better judgment told him this was wrong, but he felt himself being drawn helplessly along.

A white-haired, kindly-looking man rose.

"I would further suggest, and I hope Mr. Wade will agree, that our Mr. Gumpers"—he indicated the chin—"shall be in constant touch with the progress of the building, and that the Wade Company shall be answerable to him on all matters in connection with it."

An agreement was placed before Bill and a pen put in his hand. The chin spoke again:

"One minute, please. Of course you understand, Mr. Wade, that in the event of the work falling behind the McNaulty Company will have the power of withdrawing the job; and should the completion date not be lived up to because of delay on your part, you will naturally pay half the amount of the forfeit."

Bill's mind whirled as he read the contract through. Somehow things had taken a wrong turn. Ordinarily he would never have agreed to such conditions; but then he had never dealt with the McNaulty Company. These men were far more experienced in such matters than he was. The contract was only an incident to them. To him it was the big chance of his life.

He signed the agreement, and they shook hands all around.

III

BACK in his office, Bill telephoned Lilla the good news. She was jubilant—full of the enthusiasm he somehow lacked.

"Why, it's wonderful, Bill! We'll simply have to celebrate right away. Be sure and come down to-night!"

The crowd was there, and the party had developed to a noisy stage when Bill arrived. There was a noticeable hush at his entrance. The glasses were filled and

raised, Bill was pushed to the center of the room, and Lilla proposed a toast:

"To the master builder!"

Bill felt twenty pairs of laughing, teasing eyes on him. He stood to acknowledge the toast.

"A speech!" some one called.

"Yes, tell us the sad, sweet story of your life!"

"Low lights and soft music, please!"

One of the girls went to the piano and played "Hearts and Flowers" in an exaggeratedly slow tempo.

Bill had always been at his worst with these youngsters, but a week ago he would have carried it off laughingly. To-day he had been through a good deal, and he was altogether incapable of rising to the height of their buoyant spirits. He was overwhelmed by the conviction that he was being made a butt for their humor. Standing there awkwardly, groping for something to say, he felt hopelessly inferior to these insolently care-free young people.

He was floundering helplessly when Lilla came to his rescue by proposing a toast to Henry Lindstrom, who had won another victory on the tennis courts that day. Henry acknowledged the compliment as Bill retreated to the far end of the room. The Swede, Bill saw, was gracefully parrying his friends' banter, skillfully dodging their thrusts, and giving as good as he received.

Feeling more awkward and stupid than ever, Bill sat down next to Lilla's father. The old man was a retired builder, and the two had always been great friends. For the rest of the evening Bill listened to a monologue on building construction; and although Lilla made one or two attempts to draw him back into the party, he saw from the corner of his eye that he was completely forgotten by the rest.

At last it was over, and Bill found himself seated next to Lindstrom in that young man's snappy roadster. He even felt flattered because the popular tennis champion had chosen to drive him home. He cast envious side glances at the Swede's beautiful car and square-cut jaw, and listened almost humbly to his flow of small talk on matters that were of such importance to Lilla's set—tennis, the newest night clubs, the most reliable bootlegger.

Quite casually Henry turned to him.

"Now that you're a plutocrat, Mr. Wade, you'll want to buy some Jenssen

Motors—you know, the new stock that's to be issued soon. We're all getting in on it. I had the tip from the company in Sweden, and we all expect to clean up on it. You must join us, of course!"

By the time he had reached his home, Bill was the owner of a small block of Jنسن Motors.

Bill shaved with a good deal of resolution the next morning. He felt that he must get a grip on himself. In spite of everything, he would have to make this job completely his own, if he was to see it through successfully. He could do it. He had done such things before.

He wiped the lather from his face and gazed long and earnestly at that offending chin. It was even worse than he had imagined.

"Bah! The jawbone of an ass!"

Bill turned from the glass completely disgusted.

At the office he was met by confusion. Desks were being pushed around, the office force was standing around in groups, and every one looked dazed and uncertain. At the door to his own office, directing the moving, he saw the tall, thick-shouldered figure and enormous jutting chin of Jeremiah Gumpers.

"Hello, Wade! Glad you're here." He waved Bill into his own chair. "I've had a hard time persuading your office force that it was O K to have a desk moved into your office for my use."

Bill felt every eye in the office fixed on him wonderingly as Gumpers continued.

"The board of directors decided I'd better be right here with you, on the ground, so that we could work with the greatest efficiency until the job's finished. I guess over by that window will be a good place for my desk, don't you think? Now I'd suggest that we call a subcontractors' meeting this morning, and get started right while we are at it."

For the next hour, half hypnotized, Bill watched that powerful chin, as Gumpers snapped out orders, spoke to contractors over the telephone, and had the drafting room rearranged for the meeting. Some of the subs were Bill's tried and true friends, but most of them represented McNaulty's favorite firms—good people, but new to Bill. He was apprehensive as he faced them. He couldn't lay down the law and tell them just what he expected of them,

as he could with his own contractors, who had served him for years.

But Gumpers was thoroughly at ease. He made a lengthy speech about the importance of the job in particular and the glory of the McNaulty Company in general. There was much flag-waving and hand-shaking. At the end Bill rose with a desperate feeling that he must say a few words, at least, about the time limit under which they must work. He felt the general annoyance at the anticlimax, and knew that his words were wasted.

IV

Six weeks later Bill stood at the site of the Belvidere Hotel. He had been bending every effort to get the work at least a few days ahead of schedule, but, do what he might, it continually lagged a day or so behind. Some of the subcontractors were working as if they had years in which to finish. Again and again he had called them together and tried to lash them into action, but each time Gumpers had wound up the meeting with a speech so full of enthusiasm for the Belvidere Hotel, the McNaulty Company, and themselves, that they would leave feeling well pleased with everything.

Gumpers was McNaulty's man, and his chin precluded the possibility of failure. Even Bill became more convinced after listening to him—until he looked at the progress sheets.

A girder was being riveted into place, and Bill had been watching absently. Suddenly he stared intently at the steel, and then strode over to where the steel superintendent was lounging against the wall of the timekeeper's shack, directing the work.

"Better have that crosspiece tightened up. Looks a bit weak from here."

The man looked him up and down, and Bill shrank visibly.

"Now, don't get nervous. I haven't been putting up steel for twenty years for nothing. That crosspiece is all right!"

He was six feet one of brawny authority, as he stood there, a cigar stub gripped between his teeth. Bill wavered.

"It looks to me—"

"I'll not be told about my own job. If there's anything wrong, I'm the one that's answerable!"

Bill turned away from the man. Walking back to the office, his mind dwelt on the incident. Why hadn't he insisted on

the crosspiece being inspected? He had the right to order it, and yet he had acted almost apologetically. The truth was that he had been painfully conscious of the other's burly strength, of his own insignificance—of his deficient chin!

Probably the girder was all right, but, if anything happened now, he would have only his own weakness to blame. The slightest accident might delay the job for weeks—might ruin him. He was half inclined to turn about and order the crosspiece tested; but to go back again would be making an utter fool of himself.

As he opened the door of his office, Gumpers was talking over the telephone.

"No—this is Gumpers speaking. An accident! What? Good Lord!" He turned and saw Bill in the doorway. "There's been an accident at the job. A steel girder fell over."

Bill woke up on a Sunday morning feeling utterly tired and dispirited. Things had gone from bad to worse at the Belvidere. The accident had set them back two weeks, and the job was hopelessly behind schedule. The board of directors of the McNaulty Company had warned him that he must do something to speed things up, or they would have to take the job over themselves. Every morning Bill went to the office determined to take things into his own hands, but at sight of Jeremiah Gumpers's massive chin all his doubts returned. He could not cope with Gumpers.

At the job it was the same way. When he attempted to browbeat the subcontractors into some show of speed, he felt that instead of listening to him they had their eyes fixed on that miserable receding chin of his. How could they be impressed by what he said?

To-day, at least, he could try to forget his troubles. He and Lilla were to have an outing—a day in the country.

The telephone rang, and Bill grasped the receiver eagerly. It was sweet to hear Lilla's clear, tinkling voice, and for a minute he listened for the sheer pleasure of it, without trying to understand what she was saying. Henry Lindstrom's name brought him to attention. Henry was playing in a tournament to-day, Lilla was saying, and the crowd would all be there. Lilla wouldn't think of going without Bill, but she would so hate to miss it! Wouldn't Bill please come, too?

Bill was no longer a firm young man. He was a tired young man, a lonely and discouraged young man, a young man who would gladly go anywhere Lilla might fancy, just to be somewhere near her.

Lilla hung up the receiver thoughtfully. She felt vaguely disappointed in Bill.

Furthermore, having started the day with that feeling, she had no trouble in justifying herself. Poor Bill was determined to please her, but he should never, never have tried to compete with this slang flinging, quick-tongued, sophisticated set of young people at their own game. Bill's game was building houses, and when he tried to exchange wise cracks with sharp-tongued little Betty Laidlaw, for instance, he was pretty sure to make himself ridiculous.

Lilla stood by critically, and watched him flounder about, and put forth no helping hand; but she was the first to rush up to Henry Lindstrom and congratulate him on his victory. When they started back to town, she was in the roadster with Henry, while Bill somehow found himself beside the driver of one of the other cars—one of the players who had lost to Henry on the courts that day.

The two men said little during the first part of the trip, for both were nursing their wrongs. Bill remembered that his companion's name was Ferris Lang, and that he was an architect. He was a little older and more substantial than the others, and Bill and he had always rather liked each other. He turned to Bill now, asking about the hotel. How was it coming along? Bill told him a little.

"Phew—touchy bunch, those McNaultys! Better watch your step!"

Henry's car passed them. He was telling a story with extravagant gestures of his free hand, and Lilla was laughing joyously.

Ferris glanced at Bill.

"That Swede has a great line of entertainment, but it comes high."

Bill eyed him questioningly.

"Of course you know he's a stock salesman—crooked as they make 'em, too. Lately he's been pushing a Swedish motor stock that I believe to be an out-and-out swindle. Some scheme! Uses his tennis as a wedge, gets into the best houses, and sticks people with this bum stock. Got building construction beat a mile, eh, Wade?"

"Does Lilla know this?"

"I've tried to tell her, but you know Lilla. All the crowd think he's great."

And he had let this crook outshine him with Lilla—had even been bluffed into buying some of the stock!

At Lilla's house they went in for a drink. Bill managed to draw her aside.

"Lilla, have you bought any of this Jenssen Motor stock?"

"Not yet. Why do you ask?"

"Because I hear it's worthless. I've got a little of it myself, but I don't want you or your father to get stuck."

"Bill, are you trying to say that Henry is cheating his own friends? How perfectly mean of you! You can't know what you're talking about!"

"Do you think I'd say it, Lilla, if I weren't pretty sure?"

"You don't seem to be sure about anything lately! I don't believe a word of this. I think you owe an apology to Henry—and to me, too!"

A feeling of fatalism came over Bill. There seemed to be a curse on him. Everything he touched turned to ashes. Now Lilla was furious with him, and he certainly hadn't intended to quarrel with her over that confounded Swede.

It would be better to stay away from Lilla altogether, rather than make another such idiot of himself as he had done to-day!

V

BILL sat at his desk, balancing in the palm of his hand a model of the Belvidere Hotel. Halfway across the building a line had been drawn, and a date—May 1—was penciled on it. On that day the building should be fifty per cent completed. That was the schedule agreed upon with the McNaulty Company. To-day was May 1, and, according to the blue prints on Bill's desk, one-fourth of the building was actually finished.

It was all over. He had failed miserably, completely. Once he had thought himself unbeatable—a conqueror, but all his strivings, his ambitions, had been a joke. He was a weakling, doomed to failure from the day he was born.

He wandered aimlessly into the outer office. Every one had left, and he was alone. His glance fell on an old, warped mirror in one corner of the room. Standing before it, he eyed his reflection criti-

cally, trying to judge it impartially. If only he didn't *look* so foolishly ineffectual!

Suddenly, in the uneven glass, his chin assumed twice its natural size. Bill was startled, not grasping the cause of this sudden change. He leaned closer, puzzled, and the effect was spoiled; but it had given him an idea. He thrust his jaw out, trying to make it resemble Gumpers's chin. The result charmed him. He posed his chin this way and that, finding the effects more and more engaging.

He became so deeply engrossed in the mirror that the door opened behind him without his hearing it. Just as he had struck the most effective pose of all, he saw other faces—the mirror was filled with faces surrounding his own. Bill froze in his last pose; then his chin dropped, and he wheeled to face the board of directors of the McNaulty Company.

He could think of nothing to say. He stood staring, dumb, and horrified. At last one of the board mumbled an apology for the lateness of the call. It was important that they should see him that evening. Bill led them, a puzzled, wavering group, eying him suspiciously, into his office.

He knew why they had come, and knew that he had lost his chance of averting the blow. A man making faces at himself in the mirror cannot in a minute assume the pose of a captain of industry. He hated the board of directors, hated himself, wished they would all clear out so that he could crawl into a corner and die!

What the callers had to say did not take long. In view of conditions at the Belvidere, they had decided that it would be best for all concerned for the McNaulty Company to take over the job. Bill was to turn over all plans, figures, and so on to Mr. Gumpers as quickly as possible. The McNaulty Company regretted the necessity, and so forth.

The board of directors circled cautiously around Bill as they made their way to the door. At last they were all gone.

Bill jammed on his hat and dashed into the street. He strode off aimlessly, trying to flee from the thought of the picture he must have presented to the board.

What a mess he had made of things! Overreached himself—that's what he had done, trying to play the big game when he had never been anything but a twopenny contractor! Now he would be left high and dry. The big hotel job had taxed his

resources, and he had been turning down other business. Fine chance he would stand of getting contracts when the story of his failure got around!

Then, too, it wasn't likely the McNaulty Company could bring the job through on time now, which meant that Bill would have to stand half the forfeit money. That would just about finish him. He would be back where he belonged—checking pay rolls, if any one would have him. As for Lilla—might as well think of the moon!

With no thought of where he was going, Bill walked directly to the Belvidere. Slowly he circled the building, appreciating its beautiful lines. With a stab of pain he saw the large sign across the front:

THE McNAULTY COMPANY

Underneath, in smaller letters, was another name:

THE WADE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

He sat on a railing across from the hotel, a woebegone figure, viewing the wreckage of his hopes. Presently he felt, rather than saw, some one at his side. Turning, he saw a small, slightly built man, hat pulled down, coat collar turned up, hands dug deep into his pockets.

The stranger, too, was staring intently at the unfinished hotel, and Bill's eye, passing absently over an insignificant profile, stopped mechanically at his chin. Bill had become an expert on chins. This one was a bad chin—a weak chin. J. Huxley Buxbaum, in his wildest dreams, had never imagined a more receding chin. It couldn't actually be said to recede. Rather, it frankly broke and ran for it, and never stopped until it disappeared into a collar several sizes too large.

Bill felt sorry for the owner of that chin. By comparison, it made his own seem normal. He looked at the man curiously, and saw that he was middle-aged, that there was a friendly twinkle in his eyes, and that he, too, seemed worried as he gazed fixedly at the building opposite.

Bill felt drawn to him. Another one of the cursed! Like himself, this man hadn't a chance in life—not with a chin like that!

"A fine building," said Bill, nodding to the little man.

The stranger turned, and the full view of his chin was even worse, Bill thought.

"Yes, a fine building," said he, speaking absently; "and our grandchildren will still

be admirin' the steel girders of it, at the rate it's goin' up."

Bill was completely taken aback.

"Yes? What do you know about it?"

"I know this—that if the man that's building it had a grain of push to him, that hotel would be very nearly finished right now."

Bill was beginning to feel annoyed. It was too much to be ridden by this insignificant creature.

"You're real sure of that, aren't you? You seem to know a lot more about it than I do—and I'm the man that built it!"

Bright blue eyes, full of mocking laughter, flashed at Bill.

"Is that so, now? And who may you be?"

Bill pointed to the sign opposite.

"I'm Wade. I'm doing the job for McNaulty."

"So you're Wade! If all they tell me about you is true, you've not much to be stuck up about. You've been a great disappointment to me, young man!"

"Who are you?" said Bill, and his eyes were very wide.

The little man also pointed to the sign.

"I'm McNaulty—Lawrence McNaulty."

"McNaulty!"

This, then, was the great man himself! This little Irishman, with no chin to speak of, had built up the great name and tradition that was McNaulty!

The full force of the thing swept over Bill. Then, suddenly, he threw back his shoulders. A weight seemed to have fallen from them. Where now was J. Huxley Buxbaum? And what was the bugaboo that had ridden him these past months, sapping his strength and almost wrecking his life? Almost, but not quite!

"Mr. McNaulty"—Bill's mind was working like lightning—"is there some place where we can talk?"

"My car's just around the corner."

Bill helped the little man almost tenderly into his limousine, and sat down facing him. A renewed sense of power engulfed the young contractor. He felt again his old self-confidence, the joy of pitting his strength against another man's. Bill was himself again, and he knew that he must make the most of this big chance that fate had thrown him—he must sell himself to McNaulty now, or be eternally lost.

"Mr. McNaulty, the Belvidere is twenty-five per cent behind schedule. Your

men told me to-day that I'm through, and it looks as if I ought to be; but I know that building better than any one else in the world. There's still a way to catch up with the schedule. I've worked out a plan. Will you let me try it? It's a long chance, but it's my building, and if any man on earth can get it up on time, I'm that man!"

"How?" asked McNaulty.

Bill rapidly sketched his plan of procedure. The whole thing had come to him in a flash of inspiration; but as he outlined the idea he knew that it was sound and good.

Listening intently, McNaulty never took his keen eyes from Bill's face. Then there was a silence. At last McNaulty spoke.

"It might be. Anyway, I've never picked a wrong man, and I hate to break my record. I've had my eye on you these last years, and I picked you for a winner. I gave you this job myself. If you can save my face and your own, and the forfeit money—boy, tell the driver to go to my office. I want to take a look at those plans."

In McNaulty's office the two men spread the plans over desks, tables, and floor, and peeled off their coats. Bill outlined the plan in detail, while McNaulty made notes on a pad.

"Lad, I'm convinced it can be done," the great man finally said. "Let's get to work!"

He pressed a button on his desk. Almost immediately the door opened and Jeremiah Gumpers appeared, trying hard to conceal his amazement at sight of Bill.

"Gumpers, see that no one disturbs us from now on. Be on hand outside, in case we want something, but don't let any one else in on your life."

Gumpers bowed and withdrew.

"Good man, that," said Bill, trying to appear casual.

"Yes, he's all right as long as he sticks to a desk. He's fine at detail; but as for building" — McNaulty grunted — "he couldn't put up a portable garage and do it right!"

VI

FIVE days later Lawrence McNaulty's luxurious private office was piled high with blue prints, charts, and drawings. Bill and McNaulty had been working steadily, estimating, planning, laying out in detail each day's work that remained to be done on the

hotel. They had not been out of the place for five days—their meals had been brought in and swallowed at odd moments—they had alternated snatching a few hours' sleep on a couch.

At last McNaulty threw down his pencil.

"Finished! And now it's squarely up to you, boy! Can you put it over?"

"Unless I drop dead," said Bill.

They shook hands solemnly, and then, as their eyes met, they burst into laughter. On each chin was as fine a growth of stubby beard as ever sprouted in five days' time.

"This," said Bill, "is my answer to J. Huxley Buxbaum!"

"And who or what might that be?"

Bill pulled a crumpled sheet of newspaper from his pocket.

"Here is the man who threw a blight over my young life—a blight which I am now about to wipe out. He said I was a weak sister, and I believed it!"

McNaulty raised his eyes from Mr. Buxbaum.

"There should be a law against him. So that's what hit you?"

"Well," said Bill, "I never gave my chin a thought until I read this stuff, and then I couldn't look a man in the eye without seeing contempt for the jaw I haven't got. I'm cured now. Let's get a shave!"

McNaulty eyed him thoughtfully.

"How do I know you're cured? Look here, young feller me lad, nothing's going to keep this hotel from getting itself finished on time now. You keep those whiskers till the job's finished. We'll not take any chances!"

"It's a go!" said Bill. "The beard stays—and if I fall down on the job I'll never cut it off!"

"Go to it!" said McNaulty. "Remember, stick right to the building. Give it everything you've got; and mind now, you keep the beard till we've won out!"

"Bring on your Delilahs!" said Bill.

Six weeks later Bill swung along the street feeling that the world was his oyster. He was worn and haggard and dog-tired, but the next day, Monday, would see the last workman out of the Belvidere, and he was two days ahead of his schedule!

More than anything he wanted to see Lilla, and at last he felt that he could face her. He faltered as he passed a barber shop, and cast a longing glance at the men

stretched there at their ease; but he had promised McNaulty, and there was still a day to go.

At Lilla's house the maid stared dazedly after the hollow-eyed, bearded apparition that dashed unceremoniously past her. Lilla's father and Henry Lindstrom were deep in a discussion in the drawing-room, and did not look up when Bill appeared in the doorway. The tennis champion was reading from a prospectus, and Bill caught the words "Jenssen Motors." Leisurely he walked across the room and took the paper from Henry's unresisting hand.

"Nice boys don't come into their friends' houses and sell them bum stocks," Bill said reprovingly.

Lilla's father was the first to speak.

"Bill!" he gasped, recognizing him.

"Yes," said Bill, "and just in time to save you some money!"

"You mean to say—" Henry Lindstrom began.

"That I tried to find out yesterday what Jenssen Motors really is. Being a stockholder, I was slightly interested. I discovered it just ain't!"

"You damned liar! You—"

Fortunately Bill saw the Swede coming, and had just time to dodge his fist. For a moment Henry towered over him. Then Bill's right shot forward and upward. All the resentment he had stored up for months went into that blow. Henry staggered and sank gently to the floor.

"Forty love!" said Bill.

"You needn't have been so hasty," said Lilla's father. "He didn't have any of my money yet, and you've probably broken his chin."

"Well, I never did like his chin," explained Bill.

He looked up to see Lilla, white and shaken, on the stairway.

"Bill, where have you been all this time?" she inquired.

"At the Belvidere Hotel. It's been the fight of my life to get it through on time, but I've won, and I'm here to lay the Bel-

videre and myself at your feet, darling! Don't mind the beard. It's coming off tomorrow."

"Bill, I think I like it. You look so—virile!"

Bill had his arms around her.

"Forgive me for knocking out the Swede?"

"Never," said Lilla; "but it was thrilling to see you do it!"

"You're about to have another thrill," said Bill. Lilla looked expectant. "Have you ever kissed a man with whiskers?"

"No," said Lilla.

"Bill," said Lilla, later, "what's the real reason for the disguise?"

"It was all due to J. Huxley Buxbaum, darling. He put a jinx on me, so I'm hiding behind these to fool him."

"J. Huxley Buxbaum?"

"Yes. He wrote an article about chins that almost ruined my promising career."

"Bill, have you seen the papers to-day?"

Bill hadn't. He had not been reading light literature of late.

Lilla picked up the paper and turned to the magazine section.

"Read that."

It was J. Huxley Buxbaum's latest article on character reading. This time it was about noses. In the center of the page was a large drawing of a nose, and underneath it Bill read:

This is the dominant nose. Forty great generals have had this type of nose. It predominates over all other features, and the man who can boast of it will conquer against all odds.

Having finished reading, he looked up at Lilla inquiringly.

"Don't you see? Come to the mirror," she told him.

She held the newspaper alongside his head so that the pictured nose was on a level with his own. They were almost identical.

"So J. Huxley Buxbaum was right, after all," said Lilla.

"He wins by a nose!" agreed Bill.

END EAVOR

BETTER to keep the harness on your back
Than lie inert upon a bed of flowers,
Better to race around life's winding track
Than toy with time through all the sunlit hours.

William Hamilton Hayne

“I’m from Arizona!”

A FAR-STRAYED COWBOY DISCOVERS THAT HE NOT ONLY POSSESSES A SUBCONSCIOUS MIND, BUT THAT IT HARBORS A PERSECUTION COMPLEX

By Earl Wayland Bowman

IN the early evening twilight Squint Sawyers sat on a bench in Washington Square. Through the leafless trees the cross over the old church on the other side of the square flared into sudden gold as some hand, within the dark and somber building beneath it, touched an electric button.

Squint noticed that some of the bulbs that gave the cross its form did not glow; they were burned out. Their absence caused the sacred emblem to have a worn-out, shabby, discouraged appearance.

“It looks almost as useless as I feel!” Squint grunted to himself disgustedly, with no thought of impiety.

A raw wind whipped up and fluttered a newspaper which some former occupant of the bench had left, and whisked it on to the pavement. Squint stooped forward, picked up the paper and mechanically replaced it at his side.

He glanced upward. The flurry of wind suggested rain, and his gray eyes searched the sky. Rain would mean another uncomfortable night—his third.

The sky was clear, save for the haze that rose over the city, like the expelled breath of some tired monster still too restless to go to sleep.

A new moon hung low above the cliff-like buildings on the farther side of Macdougal Street.

“That’s west,” Squint muttered. “Gawd, if I ever get back, New York can go plumb to hell!”

The unhappy outlander stared at the moon. He thought, with heart-breaking loneliness, of the many times he had seen that same lovely crescent in its silvery splendor, poised above the silent peaks of Apache Range.

In his mind’s eye, he jogged his pony back to the ranch after an honest day in the saddle, fanning the Bar-L-Bar cattle away from the Sonora line. He laughed bitterly now, in self-derision, as he remembered how often he had cursed the desolation, the silence, and the monotony of Arizona.

It was in one of his moods of utter disgust with a cow-puncher’s lot that opportunity for a big adventure had come to Squint Sawyers.

“You’ve been ravin’ about wantin’ to change your environment,” old Kelso, owner and foreman of the Bar-L-Bar, had told Squint when they were loading the horses he had sold by mail to a New York buyer. “You’ve been cussin’ about wantin’ to mingle with ‘civilization.’ Now you can chaperon these broncs to New York an’ turn them over to the consignee, which is Major Frederick Burlingworth, horse expert of the Westfield Polo Club, an’ who’ll be there when you arrive. After which, do as you dog-gone please, an’ may Gawd have mercy on your soul!”

“Me, I’m rarin’ to go,” Squint declared excitedly.

“Well, here’s your transportation an’ a hundred dollars—which is forty more’n you got comin’,” Kelso continued. “Hang on to your return transportation. It’s three thousand miles from New York to Sonoya Sidin’, an’ that’s a hell of a long walk for a bow-legged cow-puncher.”

Squint’s raw-edged Stetson sailed into the air and a yell of delight escaped from his lips. He breathed deeply while the gentle Arizona breeze ruffled his brick-red hair. The other cow-punchers of the Bar-L-Bar looked on and swore enviously at Squint’s good fortune.

That was a round month before young Mr. Sawyers sat on the bench—the hard iron bench—in Washington Square. Discouraging things had happened since then.

Squint felt now that he should have crossed his fingers, tapped on wood, thrown salt over his left shoulder, and borrowed at least one of the two rabbits' feet owned by "Snow" Johnson, Ethiopian cook for the Bar-L-Bar. Instead he had hilariously replied to the boss's warning:

"Don't worry none about me, Mr. Kelso. Squint Sawyers has been a ridin' too long to start to walkin' now!"

II

For awhile events had appeared to justify the cowboy's optimistic boast. Every horse was on its feet and in good shape when they hit the Jersey City yards. Major Frederick Burlingworth, according to schedule, was right on time, and greeted Squint and his charges with true hospitality.

"We'll be glad to have you come out to the club," the major declared, "and make it your headquarters while you look around New York. You might feel more at home with us than at a hotel. We have a lot of good ponies, but none," he added honestly, "better than these Bar-L-Bar fellows!"

The cowboy bubbled with enthusiasm.

"Thanks entirely, Major Burlingworth," he replied, "but here's one cow-puncher that's plumb fed up on four-legged ones. The 'ponies' I'm aimin' to look over are the ones I've read about that range along that street you call Broadway!"

Squint squinted an eye a little more obliquely.

"Just show me which direction Broadway is an' turn me loose!" he added. "I'd kind of like to maverick around independently."

Major Burlingworth laughed.

"As you like," he agreed. "But you'd better take my card, and don't hesitate to let me know if there's any little thing I can do. Arizona has been awfully decent to me, on my several trips to the West, and I hope New York will be as hospitable to you."

Squint took the card and tucked it into his bill fold with his expense money. The major directed him toward Broadway, and the cowboy was on his way to gain experience.

It was a bright and joyous way for a

week, and another week, and part of a third week.

From the Bronx to Bowling Green and back again, Squint Sawyers "mavericked" in the ecstasy of exploration, amid the wonders of the world's most wonderful city. And then it happened—

Some uncanny intuition, or perhaps it was the work of an evil spirit, guided Squint to the Central Park zoo. Before he knew it, he was looking into the coyotes' cage.

"Well, I'll be dadgummed!" Squint exclaimed delightedly. "Who'd of expected to find them here?"

The patriarch of the coyote family paused suddenly in his restless, hopeless pacing, pointed his nose into the air and yelped. The others joined in the chorus. Squint thrilled.

"Howl, dog-gone you, howl!" he choraled. "I've heard your pa an' ma an' uncles an' aunts an' all your whole danged relations do it millions of times."

The coyotes stopped as suddenly as they had begun, and it seemed to Squint as if a cloud had swiftly come over the sun. He stood uneasily for a moment, then turned away and mingled again with the crowd.

A queer loneliness gnawed at his heart. He felt, all at once, as if he were a *Robinson Crusoe*, wrecked on an island of loneliness in an ocean of human beings. And not a human soul among them was a friend.

The feeling of sadness grew on Squint as he went back to Fifth Avenue, climbed onto a bus and started down town to the thicker crush.

"It's danged strange," he mused, as the bus whirled along, "but they say there's six million people in this darned town, an' I've been here over two weeks an' ain't met a single teetotal soul I'm acquainted with. Or, for that matter, I ain't got acquainted with a dog-gone individual! Maybe I've been too offish myself."

The bus stopped. A lady who reminded Squint, in her age and size, of Mother Allen, genial hostess of the Elite Café, in Socorro Junction, crowded into the seat beside Squint. He looked around at the plump, matronly figure beside him, grinned good-naturedly, and remarked:

"Kind of a tight fit, ain't it? But I reckon we can make it. I know a lady out in Arizona that's just about as fat as you are."

Squint's seat mate stiffened as if an electric shock had hit her. The corners of her aristocratic mouth drew down into the pointed horns of a half moon, her high-bred nose shot up to a chilling slant.

One deadly subzero glance from her hard brown eyes stabbed Squint to the marrow. And there was all about him a sense of silence as if he had stumbled into a lonely tomb.

At the next stop Squint alighted from the bus and walked over to Broadway. He sighed heavily and often as he wended his way past the surging Forties toward Times Square, and through it.

Squint wanted to talk to somebody, anybody; he felt that if he didn't talk soon he would explode. Never before had he realized how important it is to talk—but the human tide flowed on. There were people to the right of him, people to the left, and never a friendly eye.

III

At Thirty-Ninth Street a policeman stood at the edge of the curb, out of the surge of human things. Squint stopped.

The policeman had a nice face; a fine face; a classical face; almost a human face. The cowboy paused for a moment beside him, glanced up and caught his eye.

"Howdy!" Squint murmured, nodding in a cordial way. "Seems like there's quite a lot of people in town to-day, don't it? Must be somethin' goin' on."

Squint Sawyers never saw the original Sphinx, but had he ever been in Egypt he would have thought of that mystic stone face as the officer gazed back at him. Then a hamlike hand swung up, the club it held motioned forward significantly, and Squint decided to move over a block and go down Sixth Avenue.

Here he drifted along, scanning the sea of faces. In all the thousands there wasn't one that looked, even a little bit, like any one Squint had ever known.

At Fourteenth Street he stood for a few moments in the whirlpool of humanity at the corner.

"Dog-gone," he muttered, "I've a notion to go right back to Arizona."

The farther down Sixth Avenue he went the stronger the notion grew on Squint. At Eleventh Street he stopped and definitely announced to himself:

"By gosh, that's what I'll do to-morrow!"

A small cigar store next attracted his attention. There was a girl—kind of short, with brown eyes and bobbed hair and a longish sort of nose—behind the counter. Anyhow, Squint needed cigarettes.

The girl pitched the box and his change on to the counter in the same motion. He lighted a cigarette, leaned against the counter, smiled his favorite grin, and remarked:

"Kind of nice little store you got here, ain't it? I'm a stranger in this town."

The girl's eyes looked as if she were about to speak. She did.

"So's your old man!" she said.

Squint laughed.

"That's a good one on you," he replied. "My old man ain't even in New York—he's dead! He got killed by some Mexican cow rustlers out in Arizona when I was just a kid."

"Write your own ticket!" the girl flashed back, her lips moving ever so slightly. There was no other sign of life in her face.

"You're missin' it every shot," Squint chuckled. "I don't need to write my own ticket. I've already got one, plumb back to Sonoyta Sidin', Arizona."

He stopped his grin suddenly.

The silence in the girl's expression was louder than the crashing roar of the elevated trains thundering overhead like giant, insane dragons; it was greater in volume than the snarl of trucks, taxis and surface cars wrangling and snapping at one another's heels in the seething gorge of Sixth Avenue.

For a moment Squint Sawyers stood unnerved in the presence of the goddess of disdain who had sold him the cigarettes. She was not human.

Squint looked at her in awe. She must be alive. She had moved—a little, at least—when she tossed the cigarettes and his change onto the counter.

Gradually, to Squint's bewildered imagination, she began to assume the face, the form, and the substance of something, of some one he had seen before. Suddenly he remembered.

It was the wax girl with the green dress, the red rose on her bosom, who always stood with one hand up and one hand down, her eyes fixed on space, staring out of the northeast corner of the show window of the Golden Rule store in Maricopa, in far-away Arizona. He devoutly wished he was back there this very instant.

With a sickly grin Squint backed toward

the door of the cigar store. The girl's in-human look still transfixed him. He felt like a bug—like that one the professor, a visitor at the Bar-L-Bar, had on a pin that day last summer.

"I—I kind of believe it's goin' to—to rain!" he mumbled, striving to exit gracefully.

He regained Sixth Avenue, and as he did so he heard a word spoken in a feminine voice. It sounded to Squint like an Irish potato thrown into a tin dish pan hard enough to bounce out. The word was:

"Bologna!"

IV

THE lights blazed on the clock on Jefferson Market; it was evening again.

Squint wasn't hungry. He thought perhaps that he ought to eat. But he wasn't craving food.

He wandered on aimlessly down Sixth Avenue, past the place where, the Sunday before, he had seen the black cat lying dead in the gutter in front of the restaurant. It was still there—and still dead.

Squint glanced at the cat and looked into the restaurant.

"I ain't goin' to eat in there!" he muttered. "That's worse than the Escobosa, in Nogales!"

In front of the cheap rooming house, "for men only," below Eighth Street, which Squint had selected as his hotel for the hilarious stay he anticipated in New York, he paused.

For a moment he wondered which was the wiser action; to go into the narrow hall, up the steps to his room and figure it all out, or first to go for a bite of supper.

"One thing's certain," Squint thought as he stood there, studying over the strange loneliness that had come to him, "an' this is that to-morrow P.M. here's one cow-puncher that's goin' to be headed back to Arizona."

"I beg your pardon," Squint's reverie was interrupted by a suave voice, "but have you a match, old man?"

The voice was the most friendly sound the cowboy had heard since the yelp of the coyotes in Central Park, in reality only hours ago, but to Squint ages before.

"This is the damnedest town I was ever in," the stranger, a stocky, nicely dressed young fellow about Squint's own age, went on as he accepted a match. "I just got here from Kansas day before yesterday,

and haven't seen a soul yet that I know. I'm so blamed lonesome I could talk to a wooden Indian!"

Squint Sawyers's heart gave a leap. Here was sympathy, understanding, a kindred soul in distress; a pilgrim like himself that needed comforting:

"Gosh," Squint replied eagerly, "that's plumb queer! I feel the same way myself. Only I've been here more than two weeks. Personally, I'm from Arizona."

The match went out, strangely enough, since there seemed to be not a breath of wind. There was a lull in the human tide pouring down Sixth Avenue from Eighth Street.

Squint handed the stranger another match. They stepped back into the narrow, rapidly darkening hall, at the foot of the stairs that led up to the "hotel" office.

"By golly," Squint went on warmly, "I sure am glad to meet you."

"Stick 'em up, and shut your trap!"

The soft, friendly voice had suddenly become the quick, vicious snarl of a cornered wolf. A gun was jammed against Squint's solar plexus.

Ten seconds later the cowboy's bill fold, the loose coins in his pockets, even the recently purchased cigarettes had changed ownership.

Then the gun came up swiftly and down even faster on Squint's head. He grunted and slumped backward, an inert heap on the stair steps, and the friendly stranger leisurely went away.

Squint revived after a little. He had a headache, an awful longing to be back in Arizona—and that was all.

"The dog-gone fool even took my cigarettes, an'—hell!—my ticket back to Sonoyta Sidin' was in my pocketbook," he moaned. "An' that card of that Major Frederick What's-his-name was in my pocketbook, too."

Squint hopelessly felt through his emptied, outraged pockets.

"That dirty cuss was a regular dog-gone bandit," he muttered. "That's all in Gawd's creation he was!"

The inevitable result was that for three days thereafter Squint had not eaten. For three nights he had not slept, save miserably under some ornamental shrubbery in Central Park.

For three days and three nights Squint had wandered drearily through the busy, self-interested throngs, hoping against hope

that some miracle would happen. Perchance he might meet again that bandit from Kansas.

Maybe some idea would be born in his brain that would help him to bridge the three-thousand-mile gap between New York City and the not so well-known, but highly interesting Sonoya Siding, out in Arizona, close to the Sonora line.

But no miracle happened. The bandit from Kansas was at no time visible. No idea was born.

V

AND so it came about that Squint Sawyers sat, discouraged, despondent, disgusted, on a bench—a hard iron bench—in the early evening, in Washington Square. He had a head that throbbed, feet that ached, and a stomach that was one large hunger pain.

The delicate crescent of silver that was the baby moon disappeared behind the clifflike buildings on the other side of Macdougal Street.

Squint raised his tired gray eyes to the golden cross above the old church, which glowed with a weird, almost ghostly light through the branches of the leafless trees.

It seemed to him that more of the bulbs that formed the cross had burned out, leaving more frequent blotches of black in the emblem of hope and light.

"Danged if she don't look sicker'n ever!" Squint muttered. "Gosh, I sure do crave a smoke."

He looked up and saw approaching a battered wreck of a man, ragged, unshaven, blear-eyed, furtive, utterly whipped. The creature slouched past the bench on which Squint was sitting.

The shifty, downcast eyes searched the asphalt pavement along the iron fence that shut children and dogs away from the grass plots of the square. There was a sudden flicker of life in this dead thing that still walked.

A clawlike hand darted downward and came back to its owner, clutching a cigar stub.

"Good Gawd!" the Arizona cowpuncher, who hadn't eaten or smoked for three days, murmured disgustedly as he watched the bum retrieve the discarded "snipe." "I sure crave a smoke, but it ain't human to want it that bad!"

Squint glanced at the newspaper lying beside him on the bench. The yellow glare

of the street light behind him illumined the page enough to give him this headline:

BANDIT MAKES HIS GET-AWAY

For a moment Squint looked at it. Then, with an impatient gesture he swept the paper to the pavement.

"I never want to see or hear that danged word again," he growled. "I'm plumb sick of bandits."

He stopped with other contemptuous words unuttered on his lips. A thought, bright with false reasoning, had flashed into Squint's mind.

He straightened up, electrified by the potential force of the idea. He scratched his red, tousled head behind the ears and thought and thought and thought.

The longer the idea lingered, the surer Squint was that it, and it alone, was the solution of his troubles. He did not consider the scheme immoral or dishonorable, or at all unworthy of a man who is a man.

Squint revolved its angles in his mind. He was sure it was only poetic justice, a balancing of accounts, entirely within the proprieties.

"If it is right that a man should pass along a good deed, a kindness that another human being has done to him," Squint was figuring, "why in hell ain't it right to pass on any kind of a thing anybody does to anybody?"

Perhaps three days without food, together with three thousand miles between New York and Sonoya Siding, may have induced in Squint a philosophy that some people might call warped.

"Somebody got mine—that son-of-a-gun from Kansas," Squint reasoned, "an', by gosh, the only thing for me to do is to get somebody else's. Which is just an even swap, an' that is all any man ought to ask! Somebody in New York took it away—my transportation back to Sonoya Sidin' an' them last twenty-five dollars—an' somebody in New York can reproduce 'em!"

There was an inexorable finality to Squint's logic that made him happy, but his joy was short lived.

"Thunderation!" he suddenly thought. "I ain't even got a gun, an' how can a man rob anybody without one?"

It appeared hopeless, so Squint went again into the dumps, murmuring.

"Dog-gone! If I set around here much longer I'll get the blues!"

He got stiffly to his feet and angled aimlessly across Macdougal Street to Waverly Place. On the corner a gasoline driven pump was sucking water from an excavation for a new building.

As Squint's foot wearily lifted itself to the sidewalk his toe kicked against something hard. He stooped down and picked up a short, flat screw-wrench.

Squint turned, thinking to toss the wrench close to the gasoline pump. The owner, the following day, no doubt would find it.

"Get away from there, you dirty bum!" the fat watchman snarled as he emerged from a doorway across the street, waving his arms importantly. "Go on. Beat it!"

"I was just goin' to—" Squint began.

"Go on. Get the hell out of here!"

Squint dropped the wrench into his pocket and turned up Waverly Place to Fifth Avenue. Then he walked and walked and walked.

He forgot that he had feet or legs. It seemed as if there was something mechanical under him that kept going up and down everlastinglly, and whatever it was, it made him—Squint Sawyers—go forward.

VI

EVENTUALLY, near midnight, Squint found himself on a bench. It was under overhanging shrubbery on a shadowed turn near the duck pond, adjacent to the Fifty-Ninth Street entrance of Central Park and not far from the Plaza Hotel.

The park was not yet deserted. Occasionally a lone stroller passed by. At intervals a policeman made his round.

Above the lessening roar of automobile traffic on Fifth Avenue, Squint thought he heard the shrill yelping of the coyotes in the zoo farther up in the park. He imagined it was the night song of their wild kin as they serenaded the silence on Geronimo Peak, three thousand miles away.

"If I only had a gun!" Squint mourned to himself, as a well-dressed, prosperous-looking man hurried past his retreat. "I'd sure get transportation back to Arizona."

He dropped his hand into his pocket. Then he caught his breath and grinned; his fingers had gripped the wrench. More than once Squint had witnessed the potency of a good bluff in a poker game in the bunk house of the Bar-L-Bar.

A new resolution was born in his heart.

He settled back on the bench and waited for a customer to appear.

Once more the policeman made his round. A spooning couple strolled up, looking for a secluded bench. They saw Squint and disappeared around the shaded turn.

The figure of a man approached slowly, as if out for a stroll before retiring. Squint pulled his hat low over his eyes and waited.

His fingers clutched the wrench. Hunger and weariness for the time were dissolved in a newborn hope.

"It would be a whale of a joke if that feller is the son-of-a-gun from Kansas!" Squint thought vengefully.

A moment later the man turned into the shadow, a few feet from the bench on which Squint was tensed like a wild cat watching a rabbit. Then the lurker darted forward and jammed the wrench against the right-hand kidney of the stroller.

"Stick 'em up an' shut your trap!"

Squint announced the formula that he had learned so well down on Sixth Avenue.

The man's hands went skyward.

Squint reached forward with his unengaged hand to search his victim.

"Drop that gun or I'll blow your head off!"

It was a low, heavy voice that spoke slowly, confidently from behind Squint. His knees went weak. The command apparently came from amid the very shadow where Squint a moment before had emerged. He hesitated, numbed by the disconcerting order.

"Drop it! Reach for the ceiling! And don't move!"

The voice spoke again with an authority that would not be denied.

Squint's weapon rattled onto the gravel; his hands obediently went up. Arizona, his favorite pony, old Pie Eye; Sonoyta Siding, the Bar-L-Bar, at that moment seemed to him to be dissolving into the mists of nevermore.

Squint's victim stooped suddenly, picked up the discarded wrench, glanced at it, stepped back and laughed.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said.

The voice sounded vaguely familiar to Squint, but he didn't look up. Instead he stood, hands raised, head down, bitterly disappointed at his holdup failure and highly apprehensive of the future.

The stranger continued to laugh, and his amusement got on Squint's nerves.

"What the hell's so danged funny?" he snarled.

"This," the other man laughed, still holding the wrench. "You stuck me up with this. Good Lord, what a joke! Nobody will believe it."

"I don't see nothin' so blamed humorous," Squint mumbled. "Ask that hom-bre behind me if I can't put my hands down."

"There isn't any one behind you."

"The hell there ain't!" Squint protested. "He just threatened to shoot me."

"Thanks, old man!" The stranger laughed again. "That's a compliment. You almost make me think I could be a professional ventriloquist!"

"Ventriloquist," Squint repeated. "You mean it was you—"

He looked up, and his mouth opened in speechless amazement.

"Squint Sawyers!" the other man gasped in equal astonishment.

He laughed once more, but this time his merriment was uneasy, pitying.

"You—a bandit?" he added severely. "With a wrench for a gun. I don't know whether it's funny or not."

"You got me with the goods on," the cow-puncher acknowledged miserably. "An' you're the last man in the wide world I'd want to hold up."

"Then why did you try to operate right here, close to the Plaza Hotel?" Major Frederick Burlingworth demanded sternly. "You know I stop here when I'm in town."

"Major, I clean forgot that—an' even your last name—but I remember now," Squint assured him earnestly. "I guess I really was headin' up here for help, an' not to play bandit the way that son-of-a-gun from Kansas did to me."

"Subconscious," the major remarked thoughtfully. "Persecution complex or illusion of revenge."

"Meaning which?" the cowboy inquired alarmedly.

"Let's take a seat on this bench, Squint," Major Burlingworth suggested kindly. "No matter what your trouble

is—mental or monetary—I'll fix you up. Now tell me all about it."

VII

THE following evening, about the time some one in the old church across Washington Square touched a button and the scattering bulbs of the cross above the sacred edifice blazed forth in their somewhat subdued splendor, a young cow-puncher was headed west. There was a happy grin on his face.

He pressed his forehead, over which drooped a tousled bunch of red hair, against the window of a Pullman car and his squinting gray eyes peered out through the hovering dusk toward a silvery baby moon hung in all its delicate loveliness above the New Jersey landscape. The cowboy sighed cheerfully; the train undoubtedly was westward bound.

He looked back. A lot of lights glimmered in the distance in the rear of the speeding train. He assumed they were the lights of New York. He wrinkled his stub nose spitefully toward them and said aloud:

"So's your old man!"

For a moment the puncher appeared to feel better. Then again he looked out of the window. The lights still shimmered and danced in the distance.

"Write your own ticket!" he flung back defiantly.

A little while afterward, as if he had thought of something important that should not be overlooked, the young cow-puncher turned once more and glared back at the now rapidly receding lights. One muscular hand slowly lifted to his face and the stubby fingers wriggled derisively.

"Bologna!" he announced scornfully.

Having done which, Squint Sawyers, of the Bar-L-Bar, settled down in the car seat, at peace with all the world. Five days hence he would tighten the cinch on old Pie Eye and ride forth under the bright sunshine of his beloved Arizona and wrangle the boss's cattle back from the Sonora line.

AMID THE SNOWS

HERE where the wild red lily blows
Amid the everlasting snows
That wreath the glittering peaks untrod,
How the soul wakes and turns to God!

Lena Whittaker Blakeney

The Way of the Wild

AN INTERESTING CHAPTER IN THE FAMILY HISTORY OF SILVER
BOY, THE GRAY FOX OF COLD CREEK CAÑON,
AND HIS ADVENTUROUS CUB

By Vance Hoyt

MOUNTAINOUS masses of bleak, surging clouds rolled in from the sea. Like a thick, wet blanket they settled over the Coast Range of southern California, hiding from sight the peaks of the Santa Monicas. It was the first storm of the season, and for two days and a night it rained. Four inches of water fell, and the dry beds of boulder-strewn arroyos became roaring torrents.

At the close of the second day the firmament cleared. The setting sun burst forth in the heavens, a fiery ball of warmth and light, framing the black billows of scattering clouds with silver and gold.

In a great cleft far up the side of Cold Creek Cañon, a fox family was bestirring itself as night approached. All day Sir Reynard and Mrs. Reynard and their two cubs had slept, only awaking now and then to sniff at the humid odor of the November rain, which pelted upon the ledge that skirted the entrance to their den.

As the declining sun cast its slanting rays into the cave, the old dog fox rose to his feet and cautiously stepped out on the shelf of rock. There he stood for a moment, scanning the expanse of the gorge below.

The russet of his neck and legs and the creamy yellow of his breast were distinct in the light of the setting sun. His large, fluffy brush was a furry plume of beauty and dignity. His tall, sharp-pointed ears stood erect. His feelers were long and bristly, lending a shrewd and cunning expression to his face—the mask of a savage hunter.

He muzzled the fragrant aroma of the dank chaparral, and its sweet, moist odors filled him with the hunting urge. As if expressing the carnivorous instincts that had suddenly thrilled the wild heart of the

little animal, he snarled and growled viciously to himself. Then he sat back upon his haunches and challenged the woodland in one rasping bark. It was his hunting call.

The sound echoed through the cañon and died in the valley beyond. A second later he slipped from the ledge and vanished in the thicket.

II

THE prolonged storm had brought about a shortage of food for this family of healthy foxes—a thing that had never occurred before in the annals of the gray hunter's existence. Always thrifty with his larder, a fox is seldom caught hungry on a rainy day; but sometimes even the best of cunning in foxdom may go amiss.

The dog fox now sought food to replenish his depleted store. With the speed of the wind, the silence of a cat, and the elusiveness of a coyote, he sped up the side of the gorge and over the ridge toward Red Rock Cañon.

More than a mile he traveled without once stopping, for his senses of sight and smell had not as yet given him an inkling of quarry worthy of his attention. Then, abruptly, he came to a halt. Testing the air lightly, he trotted out upon a jutting piece of rock, and stood for a moment searching the wind carefully with his slender, black-tipped nose.

Presently, as if a message had been borne to him on the air, he wheeled, and, veering to the left of his former course, swiftly took off along the escarpment of the ridge, toward the base of Calabasas Peak. Wending his way through the dense undergrowth, he approached the mountain at an angle, coming to a stop halfway up

the eastern slope of the peak. Here his nostrils winnowed the breeze again, and again the air brought to him the enticing scent of food.

Reassured in his hope of a successful hunt, he cautiously moved down the side of the mountain. Coming to a large boulder, he sprang lightly upon it, and crouched where he could command a view of the ravine below him.

At the bottom of the ravine there was a small pool of what seemed to be black, bubbling water. As a matter of fact, it was a pit of brea, or liquid bitumen—a thick, heavy petroleum that had been forced up through a great rent in the earth by gas pressure from the eocene beds below. Now that it had rained, there was a thin layer of water upon the surface of the pool.

This tarry deposit was a veritable pit of death, trapping the wild folk of the cañon in its sticky substance. For thousands of years it had dealt out death to beast and bird; and this had made it a hunting haunt, where flesh eaters came to feed upon the trapped quarry, or, in turn, to become prey themselves for other carnivorous creatures that lurked at the brink of the pit.

Even now there was a victim struggling helplessly in the tenacious substance of the pool—a full-grown rabbit. Only the animal's head was visible above the deceptive surface of the water.

It was the scent of the cottontail that the fox had detected a mile away; but the keen olfactory nerves of the little gray hunter also tingled to the odor of another animal—a raccoon. Extending out over the treacherous pit was the slanting trunk of a large sycamore, whose gnarled and twisted limbs swept downward grotesquely near the surface of the pool. Lying out upon the branches of one of these limbs was a large male raccoon. Just beneath him was the helpless rabbit, trapped in the tar.

Reynard knew this raccoon, for the two had met before at the pool in search of food. Although they were not avowed enemies, the fox, on several occasions, had shrewdly taken advantage of their acquaintance, thereby placing himself in the grizzled old fellow's disfavor.

For a long time the fox stood eagerly watching the scene below him, with a grin upon his wise-looking face. At the present

moment there was no necessity for him to move nearer, for the situation of affairs at the pool promised to develop favorably. Past experience had taught him the value of secretiveness, silence, and patience. The arch little animal sat back upon his haunches, serenely awaiting the opportune moment for action.

From all appearances, the snorting and sighing raccoon was experiencing no little trouble in retrieving the rabbit from the sticky liquid of the pit. The surface of the sycamore was slippery after the rain, and the bearlike animal found it difficult to secure a firm hold upon the smooth branches.

However, a raccoon is an ingenious individual. Failing in one effort to reach the rabbit, the grizzled veteran tested another position, meanwhile sighing to himself in a bored sort of way. Finally he hung by his feet from a low-sweeping limb, almost as a monkey might hang, reaching downward with his long and efficient arms.

Farther and farther he stretched himself, until he touched the tips of the rabbit's ears. Then he relaxed for the final grasp; but in that instant his hold upon the limb slipped, and he would have fallen into the pit if he had acted a second too late in grasping the branches above. With a snort of fright, he swung himself up on the limb, where he sighed and sighed, seemingly weary of the world and its problems.

Not for long did he hesitate, however. The rabbit was slowly but surely sinking from sight, and in a moment the raccoon was making another attempt.

This time he secured an anchorage upon the branches with his feet and one hand. Then, hanging downward, he caught the rabbit by the ears and pulled with all his strength. It was a tussle for him to withdraw the cottontail's body from the sticky tar, and he tugged away at it, snoring and snarling to himself. Finally his persistent efforts were rewarded, and the pool gave up its victim.

With a deep sigh of satisfaction the raccoon lifted himself aloft. Quickly he caught the neck of the rabbit in his great teeth, and broke it with a mighty crunch. Then he bounded down the bole of the tree to the brink, carrying the tar-covered form of the cottontail with him.

Now that the rabbit had been retrieved from the pit by the raccoon, the silent and motionless fox—who had been watching

the scene just enacted from his position on the boulder above—became alert. Vanishing in the brush, he moved swiftly down the side of the ravine. At the edge of the open space that surrounded the pool he came to a halt. Here, in the thicket, screened from sight, he stood for a moment, watching the raccoon prepare for a feast.

Reynard's scheming little brain was contriving some means whereby he could secure the rabbit for himself; but he had not decided how to go about it. A raccoon was a formidable adversary, and the fox was at his wit's end in seeking a solution of the perplexing problem. Presently, however, a shrewd and eager grin flashed across the gray hunter's crafty face.

From down in Red Rock Cañon there came the bark of a dog. It was the bay of an English foxhound, whose hunting cry was often heard as the great dog gave chase before his master. Whenever that weird, deep-toned voice echoed through the hills, the dwellers of the woodland would quake with fear in den or burrow, so frightful and menacing was the sound; but this old dog fox had never feared the hound. On several occasions they had met, and each time Sir Reynard had cleverly eluded his enemy. As the baying of the foxhound drew nearer, he did not seek safety in flight. Instead, he crept through the brush and moved down the cañon in the direction from which the bark of the dog was coming.

Meanwhile the raccoon went on preparing his meal, unaware of the fact that the fox had been watching him from the thicket. Holding the rabbit up by the ears, he tore the skin away from its neck. Then he stripped the furry integument from the body, as neatly as a trapper would have performed the feat.

Sitting erect, with his bushy black-ringed tail beneath him, he held the carcass in his hands, chewing at it with the side of his mouth. As he ate he looked about nonchalantly, apparently well contented with himself and entirely unsuspicous of his surroundings.

Presently, however, he paused in his feast, snapped his head around, and peered into the dense undergrowth behind him. The baying of the hound had suddenly quickened and become intensified. It was louder and more melancholy now—significant of a chase.

For the moment the raccoon froze. His doglike ears were set to catch any near-by sound. Then, with a sigh of relief, he returned to his meal, and continued his munching as imperturbably as ever.

Suddenly a small gray form shot out from the thicket into the open, as silently and swiftly as the shadow of a hawk passing over the earth. It was the gray fox. Quick as lightning, he doubled and scooted back into the thicket, within twenty feet of the point at which he had bounded into the clearing.

With a loud snort, the raccoon dropped his prey and reared like a bear, snapping his fangs together, ready for fight. The fox had passed by him so quickly that the grizzled beast was unable, for the moment, to determine in which direction the gray flash had vanished. His shrewd little black eyes shone fire, as he vainly searched his surroundings for the thing that had startled him so rudely.

As sudden as a gust of wind, a repellent odor came to the raccoon. An instant later he stood staring into the eyes of a dog, whose great head was thrust forward out of the fringe of thicket, momentarily immobile as a statue. The hound's long, flapping ears extended below his neck, their weight sagging deep creases across his low forehead. His lips hung in flaps over his jowls, and they were flecked with foam.

Only for an instant the dog paused, and then he sprang forward into the clearing; but in the next second he received the surprise of his life.

Rearing upon his hind legs, posing like a prize fighter, the old raccoon went into action with all the fury of a wild cat. With his long and sharp fangs he slashed his assailant unmercifully, until the hound, emitting howls of dire distress, streaked for home, his hind legs galloping awry in a ludicrous manner.

During the excitement the half eaten rabbit had been forgotten by the raccoon. In the tick of a second, crafty Sir Reynard had flashed in and sped away with the coveted prize flung over his shoulder. The fox's clever maneuvering had won him a feast.

III

DUSK fell, and the gloom of night began to settle over Cold Creek Cañon. In the den of the gray fox the two puppies whimpered with hunger. For a day and a night

there had been nothing for them to eat, and seven-month-old whelps possess voracious appetites; but their suffering aroused slight sympathy in their once fond mother's heart. They were too old now to play longer upon her maternal instincts, and it was high time for them to learn how to fend for themselves. That is the way of the wild.

Although Mrs. Reynard was still as fussy with her young as an old hen with her brood, she scolded them with growls, nipped their ears until they ceased their whining, and cleaned their fur with the rough surface of her tongue.

Presently the little mother rose to her feet. Then she passed out of the cave and stood upon the ledge. In the fading light of evening she sniffed the nectar of the cool, damp air and stared eagerly up the side of the cañon toward the ridge above.

Left alone, the two cubs immediately came to grips. Rearing upon their hind legs, each placing its paws upon the other's shoulders, they swayed from side to side, walking around in circles, snarling and growling at each other. Then they would release their hold. A stratagem of stalking would follow, each puppy pouncing upon the other in a most savage and vicious fashion, as its turn came to experience the pleasing sensation of crunching the neck of its prey.

Suddenly a soft growl came from the mouth of the den. It was the warning voice of their mother, and the puppies froze in the very posture in which the sound had found them. For a breathless moment they stood poised in the grace of their wild beauty. Their heads were cocked to one side, and their faces had an expression of inquisitive interest; but a few suspicious sniffs told them nothing, and they quickly relaxed and continued with their play.

Again came the growl for silence, but this time it had a different shading. It was not so much a warning of danger as a demand for their attention. The keen ears of the puppies were quick to detect the change, and they immediately made a scramble for the opening; but before they reached the ledge upon which their mother stood, their sire trotted proudly into the den with the half eaten rabbit flung over his shoulder.

Dropping his spoils upon the floor of the cave, the dog fox stood over the carcass

of the cottontail, snarling at his young and warning them to keep at a distance. Never before had he acted in this way. The cubs had always eaten first of the game he brought to the den.

The male parent's sudden change from his usual behavior was not a little puzzling to the puppies. They could not help moving nearer to the tempting meal, drooling expectantly; but a slash from their sire's fangs sent them yelping farther back into the cave. Here they crouched and whimpered to themselves, as they hungrily watched their parents consume every particle of the rabbit, save the bones of the head and the spinal column.

Having finished their meal, Mr. and Mrs. Reynard licked their chops and thrust their noses together, as if they said to each other:

"My! Wasn't that delicious?"

Then they strode out upon the ledge, with never a glance at the cowering cubs in the corner; and presently the sire and the vixen faded into the night, apparently upon another food excursion. The law of the wild is self-support—the acquisition of food by the use of one's own strength and wit; and these fox puppies were being taught the cruel, inevitable lesson—the first principle of animal life.

For a time the hungry cubs soothed their appetites by gnawing the meaty shreds from the picked bones that their parents had left to tempt them; but this only served to arouse a still more insistent craving. Made irritable by hunger, they began treading about the den restlessly, snarling and snapping at each other. Now and then they would venture out upon the ledge, whining to themselves, and eagerly awaiting the return of their parents. All night they waited, but in vain; and the hunger in their little stomachs gnawed and gnawed.

Then, in the black hour before dawn, the bolder of the two—the dog puppy—ventured off the shelf of rock and fearfully embarked upon the first great adventure of his life.

It was not exactly courage that possessed the cub. It was the overwhelming urge for food that drove him on. Cautiously he crept up the side of the great cañon. The least sound in the brush caused his heart to thump in his throat. He was all eyes and ears. A tiny rustle in the undergrowth would flatten him to the earth. The con-

stant dripping from the rain-laden leaves of the woodland wore on his strained nerves, and kept his young and supple muscles aquiver.

Now and then he would pause to relieve the tension of his body. Crouching low beneath some scrub, he would listen with bated breath for the least sound of danger. Then, moistening his lips as if he were feverish with fright, he would again steal onward.

As the minutes passed, and the puppy crept over the ridge, farther away from his home, a courage came to him that he had never known before. It was a new sense of self-reliance that emboldened him. He stalked forward with less timidity, along an open trail that wound its way through the chaparral, leading down into Red Rock Cañon.

Not a sound did the fox make as he swept along; but in the offing, a few hundred feet away—always moving down the wind—something followed him, as silent and phantomlike as if it were his shadow. Whenever the puppy paused and sniffed at his surroundings, as he often did, his invisible companion also came to a standstill.

The cub knew that he was being followed, although his eyes and ears were of no value to him in detecting the silent stalker. Some strange sixth sense of the wild folk told him that it was the dog fox. For awhile the near presence of his parent distracted his attention and made it difficult to maintain the alertness that is so necessary in the pursuit of prey. His little animal brain, brimming with its foxy intuitions, told him that the ties between sire and cub were severed for good; and the old fox's persistent encroachment upon his privacy annoyed and angered him in his new status of independence.

Presently, however, the puppy adjusted himself to the situation, and gave no further heed to his sire's presence. His attention had suddenly been attracted by a rustle in the leaf mold a short distance ahead of him. Instantly he came to a rigid stand. He poised for a moment, immobile as a rock, the tints of his furry coat blending with the color scheme of the surrounding underbrush.

Again came the sound. This time the quick eyes of the young fox caught the flash of a long-tailed lizard as it scampered toward a distant clump of rocks. With all the

savagery of his growing hunger, the cub pounced upon it. With his sharp claws he caught the tail of the skink and held it fast.

Then a surprising thing happened. Without any apparent effort—without even slackening its speed—the skink separated itself from its tail and passed on, unscathed, to a haven of safety, leaving a writhing appendage in the paws of the fox to mock the would-be slayer.

The puppy was not discouraged, however. Instead, he was seemingly thankful for small favors received; and with low, throaty growls he consumed his scanty meal in one vicious gulp.

IV

THE sun had now risen, and it was broad daylight. The cub fox continued on his great adventure, but he moved forward through the chaparral with greater caution. Some instinct prompted this, now that the protective darkness of the night had disappeared.

The severed tail of the lizard had only served to sharpen his hunger. He no longer wasted energy in resenting the proximity of the old fox. The quest for food occupied his whole attention, and his hunting instincts were keyed to a high pitch.

Memories of luscious viands that his parents had brought to the den in the past taunted him. As he crept forward through the dense growth, he growled and snarled to himself. Oh, for the tender flesh of a rabbit upon which he could vent his hunger rage—or, still better, the meat of a fowl!

A whimper came into his throat. Then, quick as a flash of light, the cub halted. A faint sound of something splashing in water set atingle the roots of the hairs on his back. Every nerve of his body went taut as he froze, his tall ears cocked forward to catch the least possible indication of prey.

For a moment he checked his breathing; and during this time other sounds came to him—unmistakable evidences of food near at hand.

So intense was the fox's pose that a tremor seized him. His little body shook as if from fear, and he was forced to sink to his haunches to relieve the tension. Lolling and grinning in eager expectation, he looked about furtively, in order to locate the whereabouts of his sire; but the dog fox was nowhere to be seen.

Then, suddenly, the puppy flattened himself and moved swiftly forward. Down the side of the ridge he sped, passing noiselessly over the surface of the earth. In the small valley below there was a marsh, where tules grew throughout the year; and it was from here that the sound had come that had attracted the cub's attention. It was down wind from the ridge where the young fox had paused; but now, as he neared the bog, a whiff of breeze told his sensitive nostrils the nature of the prey—mallards!

Only once in his short life had this puppy ever eaten of duck. That was in the early summer, a few months after his birth; but he never forgot the strong, gamy taste he had loved so well. Often since, when hungry, that delicious flavor had haunted him; and now the memory of it brought forth all the cunning instincts of a breed of stalking hunters.

Even the experienced old dog fox could not have approached his quarry with greater stealth. To within fifty yards of the reedy tarn the cub crept. Here, concealed behind a tuft of grass—scarcely high enough to cover the tips of his pricked-up ears—he paused.

As he waited, he again scented the approach of his sire; and instinctively he sensed rivalry in the parent's presence. The cub's next move was the most difficult and important of all—the capture of the duck; and the nearness of the older and more experienced fox annoyed him. He felt a vague fear that in some way he might be cheated of his prey.

It was indeed a thrilling sight that tempted the hungry fox. A flock of mallards—two drakes and several ducks—were dredging the shallow waters of the marsh in a most proficient manner. At intervals they would stand on their heads, and, with only their tails showing above the water, propel themselves forward in a ludicrous fashion, meanwhile probing with their bills in the mud below.

Instinctively the cub knew that the opportunity for the kill would come when the heads of the ducks were hidden beneath the water; but never for an instant were they all submerged at once. As if from an understanding, one of the drakes was constantly on the watch. A moment's observation convinced the puppy that an open charge would inevitably meet with failure.

He did not reason this out in a train of thought. He simply knew—that was all. His heritage of ancestral experience gave him the knowledge. Apparently there was nothing for him to do, save to remain perfectly still; so that is what he did—he waited for something to happen.

Although the cub had never before attempted to catch a duck, the crafty old dog fox was not so inexperienced. He had no intention of standing aside and allowing this excellent opportunity to secure a perfect meal to be spoiled by some foolish move on the part of the puppy.

Presently the keen eyes of the young fox caught sight of a small black object moving, with hardly a ripple, on the surface of the shallow water. Slowly it drifted on its course among the tules. Nearer and nearer it approached the ducks, looking as harmless as a little piece of drift-wood. As a matter of fact, however, it was the slender muzzle of the sire, the only part of his body exposed above the surface of the water.

The realization that he was about to be robbed of his prey brought a vicious growl to the throat of the helpless puppy. An urge seized him to rush forward and risk a chance at the nearest duck; but some instinct, or perhaps painful memories of parental discipline, stayed the impulse.

Unmindful of the innocent-looking object that floated toward them, the drakes sensed no reason for alarm. Several times one of them paused in his feeding, cocked his velvety green head to one side, and set a quizzical brown eye upon the little black thing that drifted steadily nearer; but each time he decided that everything was all right and dived for another dredging expedition in the mud of the marsh.

Then it happened—and as quick as the snap of the fox's jaw. As the drake lowered its head into the water, it was seized and dragged beneath the surface, never to come up alive. With a booming of wings, churning a great spray in the water, the rest of the flock zoomed into the air and vanished from sight over the ridge.

The dog fox, proud and arrogant, waded out of the tules. He held the neck of the drake gripped in his mouth, and the bird's lifeless body was swung over his back for his trek to the den.

A fiercer hunger than ever seized the thwarted cub at the sight of this wonderful catch. He yipped a rasping bark of

defiance at his parent, and suddenly felt emboldened. A savage courage tingled in his blood, and he stalked challengingly toward the larger fox. Every hair of his back stood on end, and there was menace in his snarls.

But the sire did not tarry to punish the unfilial upstart. Instead, he complacently grinned at the angry cub and nonchalantly trotted off over the ridge toward Cold Creek Cañon.

The young fox rattled out bark after bark in his frenzy of rage and hunger. The lesson had been a cruel and bitter one. Terrible would be the fate of the next duck should the cub be lucky enough to get a second chance.

V

At the hour of dawn a man passed over the Red Rock Cañon trail, and, swinging off to the right, followed the creek bed up a broad ravine toward Calabasas Peak. Near the head of the ravine he turned into the dank thicket and forced his way up the east slope of the gulch. Having climbed several hundred feet, he came to a halt and concealed himself in a crevice of the rocks. From this point of observation he commanded a splendid view of the floor of the ravine below, where, in the gloom of the dawn, there lay an inky black pool—the tar pit.

Alden was a naturalist, a student of animal lore; and he had selected this deposit of brea as one of his favorite points of observation in his studies of the wild folk. On this particular morning he waited for an hour without a sign of life revealing itself. The sun had risen, and was casting its flood of light and warmth upon the wet chaparral, which glistened in the sunlight—an elfin forest whose trees were studded with diamonds.

At length the man's attention was attracted to a flock of ducks that suddenly rose from the marsh down the cañon, and he heard the barking of a fox, faint in the distance. Still, no living thing had shown itself near the pool, save an industrious ground squirrel who was diligently repairing the entrance to his burrow, which had been damaged by the rain.

Suddenly the gray form of a young fox shot out from the edge of the thicket; but, although the attack was made with almost incredible swiftness, the squirrel eluded capture. He vanished in the entrance to

his underground home as if he had been a bullet shot down into the earth from the sky above.

Frantically the hungry fox—it was the cub whose parents had driven him out on his first hunting expedition—set to digging at the tunnel of the burrow; but in a moment a tiny head bobbed up out of the earth a short distance away. There were evidently two passages to the den below. A crafty fellow was this squirrel!

Instantly the fox sprang, but the advantages were all in favor of the rodent, who again disappeared in his burrow.

Thwarted again, the cub sat down, as if to think the matter over. Soon some instinct prompted action. Scratching with his long, sharp claws, it took him only a few seconds to fill one of the openings with earth. Then, starting at the other entrance, he began to dig in to his trapped victim.

All this Alden witnessed, through his glasses, from the ridge above; but in the midst of the scene his attention was diverted from the cub and the ground squirrel to another gray form that had suddenly appeared at the fringe of the thicket. It was the dog fox.

Alden immediately recognized the animal as Silver Boy, his old friend and former companion. Long ago he had caught this fox in a box trap, and had succeeded in making a pet of him. For several months the animal had slept beside the hearth in the naturalist's cabin; but his wild heart was never content in captivity, and finally Alden gave the old fellow his freedom.

Often since, during his wanderings through the forest in his study of the haunts and habits of the woodland dwellers, Alden had come upon the liberated captive; and always, at the sight of the clever old fox, the nature-loving heart of the man would receive a thrill. Of all the wild folk that Alden had tamed and studied, Silver Boy was his favorite; so it was with pleasure that he greeted another opportunity to watch the hunting tactics of his former pet.

For a moment Silver Boy hesitated at the edge of the clearing. From all appearances he was studying the situation that confronted his offspring; and it seemed to Alden that the older fox was critical of the young hunter's strategy. Presently he moved stealthily out into the open. There was a grin upon his sharp and crafty face

as he drew near to the younger fox; but the puppy gave no heed to his presence until the sire, with a quick, snarling slash, drove the cub away from the tunnel.

Sniffing at the open door of the squirrel's burrow, as if to satisfy himself that the rodent was really down below, Silver Boy carefully cleared the entrance of all débris. When he had finished he moved away toward the little mound of earth that the cub had heaped upon the other mouth of the den, near the fringe of the thicket; but he had scarcely taken a dozen steps when the impatient puppy was again tearing at the earth. In an instant the sire was upon him, and he sprang back several feet with a yip of pain.

Again the older fox cleared the mouth of the open tunnel with meticulous care; and this time, as his parent moved away, the cub did not set claw to the earth. Instead, he crept within a few feet of the entrance, where he crouched, half upon his haunches, staring eagerly at the opening. It was plain to Alden that he had seen what his sire intended to do.

As the dog fox began tearing open the closed tunnel, the puppy hugged nearer to the earth, with every muscle of his body set for the fatal spring when the rodent should be forced out of his den. With surprising rapidity Silver Boy dug into the soft, wet earth, transforming the tunnel into a narrow ditch. In a few moments he was so deep in the ground that only the end of his brush was visible.

The unlucky squirrel now found the back door of his home literally caving in upon him. He was forced to move up into the free passage that opened out upon the earth above, where crouched the puppy, waiting for his prey.

Presently something moved within the entrance to the burrow, just below the surface of the earth. Then the nose of the squirrel popped up into full view, and, quick as the dart of a bee, the cub sprang. Catching the rodent in his claws and needlelike teeth, the young hunter killed his victim instantly.

VI

CARRYING his prey, the cub crept back near the protective foliage of the thicket, and began tearing at the limp body of the squirrel with the ferocity of starvation. All the while he growled and snarled at his parent, warning the old fox to keep at a

distance; but Silver Boy paid no heed to the belligerent attitude of his progeny. The bark of a dog down in Red Rock Cañon had caught his attention.

Alden recognized the sound as the baying of a foxhound that belonged to the kennel of the Boy Scouts Camp. He had never liked the dog, as it had often been a disturbing element in his studies of the wild folk. This morning it was evidently coming up the cañon toward the pool. The actions of Silver Boy told him that much. Moreover, the hound had suddenly ceased its baying, which the man knew to be an ominous sign.

Silver Boy had already left the clearing and trotted up the ravine, vanishing from sight; but the cub fox did not move from where he lay at the edge of the thicket, hungrily devouring the squirrel. Apparently he was not conscious of the dog's approach, so busy was he with his meal. When he caught the first whiff of the repellent scent of his race-old enemy, it was too late for him to efface himself. The dog was already within the clearing and at him.

Although the little fox darted away with all the speed of terror, he was not swift enough to escape the powerful jaws of the hound. Caught by the ruff of the neck, he was flung into the air. Like a cat, he came to the earth on all fours and sped up the side of the ridge.

The cub had been hurt by the dog's powerful teeth, and, although his injuries were not serious, his speed was greatly hampered. He did not take to the open, nor did he run in a straight line. He sought the advantage of the protective chaparral, and weaved his way through it in an intricate pattern of twists, circles, doubles, and figure eights.

In the actions of a fox, no matter what he does, there is always evidence of cunning, and of a sense of humor. A stalk or chase is sport for him, and he delights in playing tricks on his pursuer. In this instance, however, the fugitive was injured, and all that he could think of was to seek the quickest safety possible from his arch enemy.

The cub's sensitive nose suddenly told him that the dog fox, his sire, was near, and he acted accordingly. Slacking his pace, he permitted the hound to draw nearer. Then, quickly cutting to the right, he scooted into a thick bramble of wild cherry.

Almost instantly there darted out another fury form of russet, creamy yellow, and gray. Silver Boy was helping him to play the game!

The hound bayed at the closeness of his quarry, and the chase was on. The old dog fox—the gray phantom of the chaparral—bounded along, grinning at the ruse by which he and his whelp were tricking their pursuer. Into a ravine Silver Boy glided—leaping rocks, whipping around scrub, his beautiful brush arched and floating out behind him, like the fluffy tail of a large gray squirrel. Coming to a shallow stream of water, the fox trotted daintily down the center of the brook for a distance of fifty yards or more. Then, leaping to a ledge of rock above, he passed up a narrow crevice to the top of the ridge.

Here the little strategist executed a figure eight. He ran up the slanting bole of a tree, and out upon one of its extending branches. There was a boulder a good ten feet beyond the end of the limb. The fox covered the span in one graceful leap. Then he sprang down the opposite side of the rock and swept along the south slope of the ridge; moving down wind, dropping lower and lower in great lunges, like a bouncing bird on the wing.

At the tree the hound lost the trail of cunning Sir Reynard. His baying ceased, and he quartered the ground for yards about, seeking to retrieve the scent of the fox.

Presently he caught it, and again his deep voice permeated the morning air. As the scent warmed, louder and more weird was his baying; but he had lost several precious moments, during which the fleet-footed fox had widened the gap between himself and his pursuer.

As Silver Boy came racing down from the ridge above, flashing from open to cover in a zigzag course, Alden's heart thumped with the thrill of the chase. He did not believe that the dog could capture the fox. Several times, in the past, he had seen the hand of death grip at the little animal's throat; but he had never known his former pet's wit and speed to fail in the face of danger.

As Alden watched through his glasses, it was evident to him that Silver Boy did not fear the dog. On the contrary, Sir Reynard's foxy humor seemed to have impelled him to teach the troublesome hound a badly needed lesson. He jumped upon

a mass of broken rocks, as if to observe the progress of his pursuer, and from this vantage point he disdainfully rasped his challenge to the dog family in general.

His taunts did not hasten the progress of his tracker. Not once did the hound look up to locate the fox and get a short cut in his line of attack. His system was to trail his prey by scent, and not for an instant did he deviate from the method that was as old as his breed.

With his long nose glued to the earth, tracing the redolent odor of the fox through the labyrinth of underbrush as accurately as a man would follow the thread of an unwinding ball of yarn, the hound came crashing down the slope of the ridge toward the jagged spirals of rock where stood the fox in plain view.

As the scent warmed, the dog's baying grew louder, and Alden keyed himself for the final clash. What scheme the fox was hatching in his shrewd little head the man could not guess; but of one thing he was certain. The serene, unruffled, and almost dignified poise of his former pet told him that Silver Boy knew perfectly what he was about.

The fox's apparent confidence in himself was remarkable. Never had Alden, in all his experience as an observer of the behavior of wild folk, witnessed such amazing coolness in the conduct of an animal at a moment of grave danger. The nearer the hound came, the less interest did the fox seem to evince in his enemy's approach. Apparently he had no feeling save a slight weariness at the tardy arrival of so bore-some an individual; but when the moment for action arrived—at the instant when the baying dog came up to the very base of the rocks—Silver Boy executed a series of maneuvers that would have filled a squirrel's heart with envy, if there had been one present to witness them.

Leaping from spiral to spiral, and running down a long, slanting seam in the rocks, directly toward the dog, until within a few feet of the animal's nose, the fox sprang over his enemy's head and alighted upon a mossy ledge across the creek. With another lightning lunge he vanished in the chaparral and was hidden from the view of the man's binoculars.

With a dismal howl of disappointment, the foxhound leaped across the brook and raced after the speedy little animal. The chase led straight down the ravine, the fox

bounding along gracefully in front of the dog, annoying the larger and more clumsy animal with his easy gait.

Now and then, as they flashed into view, Alden could see through his glasses that Silver Boy was permitting the dog to draw very close to him. The fluffy brush of the fox was slowly sagging—an apparent indication that Sir Reynard was near the end of his powers; but Alden knew this to be only a ruse. He could not detect, in the racing movements of the fox's body, the slightest indication that his former pet was growing weary. Whatever his game, the man concluded that Silver Boy was playing it to the smallest detail.

In another moment the fox and the dog shot out from the entrance of the ravine into the opening surrounding the tarry pool. So close was the hound to Silver Boy that there was scarcely a space of two feet between the muzzle of the dog and the tip of the fox's brush, which now floated straight out behind, flaunting contemptuously at the nose of its pursuer.

As if by a miracle of accurate timing, during the single second that it required for pursuer and pursued to cover the remaining distance to the edge of the tar pit, the fox permitted the dog to gain another

foot. Then, on the very brink of the pool, Silver Boy flipped his great brush across the face of the hound, as if to blind him, and sprang up the slanting bole of the sycamore that leaned out over the pit.

Realizing too late the trap into which he had been inveigled, and unable to stay the momentum of his heavy body, the dog plunged straight on into the pit. Baying and floundering about in the sticky black substance of the pool, he soon became helplessly ensnared.

Running down the trunk of the tree to the bank of the pit, Silver Boy stood for a moment watching the struggles of his helpless enemy. Then he sat back upon his haunches and barked at the dog; and, as he did so, he grinned a foxy grin. The next instant he had effaced himself—had vanished as if he were a phantom that had come and gone in a flash.

To have witnessed the dog's defeat—the clever vengeance that his former pet had wrought upon this tormentor of the wild folk—brought a smile to the lips of the man.

"However, I suppose I'll have to go down and get the major's prize hound out of the mess he's got himself into," Alden concluded reluctantly.

ON THE DEATH OF A LADY NAMED MAY

FAIR friend, may one who knew you scarce at all
By count of meetings—yet in meeting once
Had met you always—place in your still hand
This little script of sorrow; may it tell
To the strange folk that, by the sullen stream
That takes you from us on this summer day,
Await your coming at the silent stairs,
How loved you were of us, how ill to spare!
How on a sudden by your going hence
Summer seems but a grinning, fearful thing,
Decked out with mockery of sun and song.

Ah! so Proserpina was rapt away,
Fairer than flowers she gathered: so I know
The pang and pity of that ancient tale,
Like a keen blade of knowledge driving sheer
Through all the bloom and music, missing you.

False month no more of men to be called May,
Save as memorial of her own sweet name,
For as who loved her you are no more fair;
All your white flowers are folded in her breast,
And all your music fled away with her.

Richard Le Gallienne

Without Finger-Prints

WHEN THE PRESIDENT OF THE PARKVILLE BANK CAME TO
GRIPS WITH TROUBLE, HE WORKED OUT A
CLEVER SCHEME, BUT EVEN A CLEVER
SCHEMER MAY BE OUTWITTED

By Charles Lee Bryson

TROUBLE stared Philander Parks in the face. He had long ago become accustomed to the sight of trouble afar off, and for two years he had watched it coming nearer and nearer, though he always hoped that by some miraculous means he might drive it back before they came to grips.

Ever since necessity had forced him to make substitutions in the securities of the Parkville Bank, of which he was president, trouble had been in plain sight in the offing. Now it had come anigh, and he was never free from its sickening presence, night or day, waking or sleeping. Trouble sat at his elbow when he worked at his desk, when he ate dinner at his club, when he took solitary drives over lonely roads. Trouble ran with him in his feverish dreams, and was sitting quietly and doggedly at his bedside when he awoke after an unrestful night.

But now that trouble had assumed a dangerously menacing air, and stared him brutally and mockingly in the face instead of sitting passively at his side, Philander was determined to do something. He would play the part of a man. He would meet and fight trouble on its own ground, and defeat it.

The bank examiners were due in a week, at the most hopeful calculation, and it did not seem possible to get past them again. He would be a weak fool to let them find evidence which would point straight as a signpost to him. He would act, and his action should be so bold, sudden, and sweeping that it must be successful, and he would stand higher than ever in the esteem of the community.

It would be hard on Wemby—yes, but what matter? Fred Wemby was the cashier, but he was a colorless, unimportant plodder. He should not stand in the way of Philander's success.

There was a way by which Wemby could be used to explain the entire amount of the shortage, which by now amounted to more than a hundred thousand dollars. At first thought the plan seemed pretty rough on Wemby, but then Wemby would know nothing of it. He would be filling a suicide's grave—at least, people would call it suicide; and what matter whether or not they believed him guilty of irregularities in the bank when he was no longer here to worry about it? It wouldn't matter in the least to Wemby.

In fact, it would be a good thing for Wemby to be beyond the reproaches of the bank's depositors when they were told that he had taken their money. Really, it would be doing Wemby a good turn, for it would spare him many a bitter moment. It made Philander feel actually philanthropic, when he looked at it in that light.

Also it would be a good thing for Philander, too—he could not overlook that; for, if Wemby were alive, he might deny the charge that he had made substitutions, and if he were insistent it might be difficult to establish it as a fact. Yes, on all accounts it would be a happy solution if Wemby should be in another world when the explosion came; and it was almost due.

Philander had thought out a plan. In fact, he had actually put the plan into operation as to some of its preliminaries. It should be a very simple matter for a man of his intelligence, of his experience

of affairs, of his keen judgment, and of the boldness and confidence which were his now that the emergency confronted him. Had he not for two years carried on, under the very eyes of the bank examiners, the amount of substitutions steadily growing larger? And they never had a suspicion!

Of course, this was going to be different. It called for getting Wemby out of the way, which demanded alert thought, skill, nerve, and some quick and clever action; but he felt fully equal to it. He knew that he must not fail in the slightest particular, or all would be lost. One tiny slip anywhere in the whole program, and people would apply to him a name which he never allowed himself to form, even in his thoughts. More, they would insist on a penalty which—oh, why let such things enter one's mind at all? It was simply unthinkable that he should make a slip anywhere!

Yes, Philander had already set the machinery in motion. A year ago Wemby had indorsed a note for a good-for-nothing cousin—at least, Philander thought of him as such—which note was already past due and still lying in the bank. He had told Wemby, assuming a high and lofty tone, and yet seeming to wish to be kind, that the note must be taken up.

It would mean serious embarrassment, he explained, if the bank examiners were to find a protested note among the bank's assets, placed there with the knowledge of the president. It might indicate a kind heart on his part, but the examiners were more interested in the soundness of his head. His own funds, unfortunately, were so tied up in large operations that he could not call in a dollar without subjecting to risk the investments of those who had intrusted him with their money. Otherwise he would gladly advance the cash himself. Such being the situation, what was Wemby prepared to do about it?

Wemby was not in a position to do anything. He had no money of his own, for the recent illness and death of his mother had left him practically penniless, as well as alone in the world. His cousin was in Mexico somewhere, but was expected back in the States any day now. Probably he would come prepared to take up the note, for Wemby understood that he had prospered. All would doubtless be well if matters could be held in abeyance for a short time—a few more weeks, or perhaps even a mere matter of days.

That was not to be considered for a moment, Philander told him. At any minute the bank examiners might step in at that door, and certainly they would be here before a week had passed. If that dishonored note were found, not only would Wemby be dismissed instantly, but Philander himself would be subjected to severe censure for having permitted it.

All his life, he continued, not without emotion, he had been most careful to keep his business reputation spotless, and nothing must be permitted to stain it now. True, because of his regard for Wemby, and his foolishly tender heart, he had been running this terrible risk, but it must end. What was Wemby going to do about it?

Well, Wemby promised to go out among his friends and try to raise the money, or at least part of it. He hoped he might have something tangible by the next evening. That would be Wednesday evening.

Philander thought that perhaps that would be in time, but positively he must know by Wednesday night. If nothing were done, he might have to humiliate himself by asking some of his own friends to advance the money, though that might give rise to suspicion that he was in financial straits, and every one knows what such a rumor may do to a man or to a bank. Not a soul must know of this note.

How should Wemby get word to him? He must not be seen coming to Philander's club. That, beyond a doubt, would start a rumor that something was wrong. Stop! He, Philander, would make the journey. He would make this further sacrifice for Wemby. He would drive past and stop, late on Wednesday night, at the cashier's cottage if Wemby would arrange to be quite alone at the place. No servant—not a soul—must know or suspect the visit, or tongues would wag; and the affairs of a bank or of a banker could not be subjected to gossip without grave risk of injury.

To this Wemby gladly agreed. He was much affected at the kindness of his employer, who not only had risked his own reputation as a careful banker, but was willing to put himself to personal inconvenience to help a friend in difficulty.

The cashier lived some three miles west of Parkville, and rode back and forth on the trolley. He and his mother had lived in a rented cottage, and since her death he had kept the place, because he had not as yet made up his mind to any better ar-

rangement. He had only an old house-keeper, and he would manage to send her away from the house over Wednesday night.

Philander Parks lived ten miles east of Parkville, in the direction of the city, at a pretentious country club, while his wife and daughter were away. They had been in Europe during the summer, and now, after a brief stop at home, had gone to Florida for the winter. It would be easy for Philander, in the course of one of his solitary night drives, to slip into Wemby's place for a few words. He frequently drove into the city in the evening and returned late—which was one reason why financial trouble had overtaken him.

Something more Philander had done in furtherance of the plan which should free him of the specter for all time. He had arranged with the tenant on his farm, thirty miles south of Parkville, to have ready for him, on Wednesday evening, a cask of fine apple cider. It was already made, and he had tasted it weeks ago. It was then developing a pleasant "kick," which should have reached perfection by now.

He told the tenant that he was a churchman, and that it was not desirable for every one to know that he was taking a keg of hard cider to his rooms at the club, so he would stop for it himself on Wednesday night. It might be very late, he said, and there was no need of any one waiting up for him, or of his arousing any one. If the keg were left in the little shed at the roadside, lightly covered with straw, he would lift it into the car himself.

Thus did Philander provide a reason for any late drive he might take on Wednesday night, in case any one should inquire.

To just one other little detail Philander attended on Wednesday. Wemby was away from the bank most of the day, trying to raise the money to care for his cousin's dishonored note; so it was easy to open the top drawer of Wemby's desk and lift out, unobserved, the shiny nickelized revolver which had been kept there for years, in case of some emergency which had never arisen. Philander was very sure it would never be missed, for Wemby had weightier matters on his mind that day.

II

WEDNESDAY night came and went, and with it went Philander's trouble. Philander thought himself almost happy, for the

first time in two years, when he awoke on Thursday morning and realized that by his cleverness and boldness he had driven away the specter for all time. Now his skies were clear. Let the bank examiners come when they would! He was ready.

He rose, bathed, dressed, ate a good breakfast, called for his car and drove to the bank. There dire news awaited him. Word had just come that Wemby had killed himself in the night. His house-keeper, returning from her daughter's half a mile away—Wemby had sent her there for the night, evidently to make sure that he would not be interrupted in what he planned to do—had found him lying on the floor beside his reading table, with a revolver at his side and a pool of blood about his head.

Of course Philander must go over at once. Poor Wemby, what could have driven him to suicide? Perish the thought, but could anything have been amiss with his accounts—and the examiners due any day now? Philander must look into affairs instantly.

He did look, and what he found was expressed in a very long face when he called in his secretary and dictated a telegram to the State bank department. The telegram said that Cashier Wemby was a suicide, and that a hasty examination of the vaults had led to the fear that there had been important substitutions in the bank's securities. Would the department please send examiners at once?

Then Philander drove out to Wemby's, arriving just as the county coroner drove up. It was a sad, sad occurrence, he agreed with the coroner—though it was he, and not that official, who expressed the sentiment. Truly it was a terrible thing. So fortunate that Wemby's poor old mother had passed on before this crushing disgrace fell upon the family name! It would doubtless have killed her. Providence had been kinder to her than she could have known.

Philander hoped that every one would remember, in these trying times, that no matter what conditions might be found at the bank which might have led to this unfortunate affair, the institution was strong—unshakable, in fact.

What were the details of the tragedy? Should they go inside together and investigate? They went in; and with them, almost unnoticed by Philander, went a tall,

angular, sunburned man whom the coroner introduced briefly as "Mr. Cushman, a relative of mine from the city."

They approached the body. Philander seemed much affected, but he bent over to look at the wound, saying as he did so:

"Shot himself in the left temple. Yes, he would do it that way—he was left-handed."

Looking at the revolver lying on the floor under Wemby's crumpled hand, Philander murmured:

"Yes, his revolver. Must have brought it home with him last night on purpose. Always kept it in his desk at the bank."

"Please don't touch anything, Mr. Parks," warned the coroner. "Cushman and I must go over everything very carefully and collect all the evidence. Nothing must be handled by any one else."

"Quite so, quite so! However plain the case may be, I understand that the letter of the law must be observed."

Philander looked on curiously while the coroner and Cushman lifted the revolver from the floor and placed it carefully in a hand bag; examined the table for any farewell letter—which they did not find; looked earnestly at the hands, the finger nails, the face, the clothing of the dead man; went over the floor carefully for clews; observed the condition of door and window fastenings, and did all the other things that a careful and conscientious officer does even when the case looks very simple.

If they found anything to indicate that the case was other than it seemed, Philander could not detect it, and he watched narrowly. They wore their professional poker faces, even when they had finished and had given permission for the undertaker to remove the body. Only when the investigation was concluded, and everybody had gone, and they were driving home together, did Cushman grasp the coroner savagely by the elbow and growl in his ear:

"That guy's too keen to make it out a suicide!"

The coroner, being a man of even fewer words, merely nodded.

And that night, at the coroner's home, when certain powders had been dusted—oh, so carefully!—upon the revolver, and high-powered magnifying glasses had been used to examine every square millimeter of its surface, and all the skill of modern science had been called in to certify what

hand had last touched the weapon, Mr. Cushman, without speaking a word, hit the table a mighty blow with his fist.

And again the coroner nodded.

III

THE inquest had been fixed for Saturday, to give the bank examiners time to ascertain the condition of Wemby's accounts. It was bad enough. High-grade securities worth more than two hundred thousand dollars were missing. In their stead had been substituted others of the same face value, but some of these were of doubtful worth, and some absolutely worthless. The discrepancy, it was estimated, might reach a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Philander continued almost happy until the hour of the inquest—ten o'clock on Saturday morning. Trouble had not again shown its face to the banker. Of course, unless one were extremely clever and extremely careful, there was always danger of a slip until the inquest and the funeral were over and the final report of the bank examiners was rendered; but had he not already proved himself a model of painstaking cleverness? He must still be wary, but it was with a light heart, though with a sorrowful demeanor, that he took the witness stand on Saturday morning to tell those six townsmen of the coroner's jury what he knew of the circumstances surrounding the suicide.

Yes, he had known that the decedent had been somewhat embarrassed financially. In fact, there was a note which Wemby had indorsed for an indigent relative, and which had gone to protest, and Wemby had not been able to do anything about it. He, Philander, had meant to take up that note himself when he thought Wemby had learned a needed lesson; but that Wemby had ever touched a penny of the bank's securities he had never dreamed—never, until word of the suicide had been brought to him. Then, of course, a sense of his duty to the depositors and stockholders had compelled him to make an investigation.

The coroner asked a few perfunctory questions, and seemed about to dismiss the witness. Philander's heart began to sing within him. Then Cushman, who sat beside the coroner, asked abruptly and in a harsh voice:

"Where were you, Mr. Parks, when Wemby was killed?"

At this sudden and unexpected question Philander felt like a mountain climber when he sees the supposedly solid rock on which he is about to step, drop from sight and open a chasm at his feet. He jerked himself back in his chair, caught his breath, and began, stammeringly:

"Why—I was—let's see—I was—" Then, recovering somewhat, he demanded indignantly: "Who are you, anyway? Why should you ask me that?"

"I speak for the coroner."

The coroner nodded.

"For a moment I was confused by your manner," said Philander, pulling himself together. "I recall now. I drove into the city that evening, and returned very late. I drove back past my country place near Eagle."

"Can you tell the jury why you went past the farm, if it was very late, and whom you saw there?"

"Yes, if it is necessary. I had asked my tenant to have a cask of apple cider ready for me, and told him that I would drive past and get it. Since it might be very late, I asked him to leave it in a shed, that I might pick it up at any hour without disturbing any one, or having him wait up for me. He did so, and I did not see or talk with any one. It was very late."

"Which road did you take, driving in from the farm?"

"Naturally, the State highway, No. 7."

"Any unusual happening on the way home? Delayed by an accident, a washout, or a mishap of any kind?"

"Nothing. There couldn't have been a washout, for it has not rained. Why did you ask me that? I drove directly back, as I have said, by the State highway, left my car at the club garage, and went to my room."

"Now, Mr. Parks, you have said that you drove directly back, and were not delayed by anything on the State highway. How could that be possible? Didn't you know that the bridge over Bunlow Creek broke down under a gravel truck at ten o'clock that night, and that all traffic had to detour many miles?"

Philander had almost been caught, but he felt that he could still save himself with ease. Oh, yes, he was clever!

"I do remember now, and I ask you to excuse my lapse, Mr.—Mr.—" Nobody helped him out with the name, and he went on: "It had slipped my mind, but I did

have to make a detour that night. I am glad, in the interest of accuracy, that you reminded me, though of course it is not material at all."

"How did you learn of the broken bridge, Mr. Parks?"

"A motorist who had been turned back met me at a road intersection some miles back, and told me that everything had to detour. The bridge was down, he said. I remember it now, distinctly."

"Who was this motorist? Do you recognize him in this room? Can you describe him?"

"I did not recognize him. He drove a rather small car, and as I recall it he had several women and children with him. I got the impression, somehow, that they were tourists, and perhaps persons I had never seen before."

"Then you detoured for several miles; and did you strike the State highway again after a time?"

"Yes, I returned to the main road some four miles this side of the broken bridge. Strange that I should have forgotten it!"

"Mr. Parks, I will now tell you the truth, and I demand that you, under oath, will tell this jury the truth. The Bunlow Creek bridge was not broken down on Wednesday night, but on Thursday night, so it follows that your amended testimony of the warning and the detour was perjury. Now I demand the truth—where were you when Wemby was killed?"

Philander's cleverness, instead of extricating him, had enmeshed him. All at once his throat was dry, and he was vainly trying to swallow. With hot tongue he tried to moisten his parched lips, while he ransacked his brain for words which should smooth over this terrible situation.

Before his mind could frame any reply, and before he could have forced his voice to utter the words even if he had them, Cushman stepped quickly forward, thrust Wemby's revolver in Philander's very face, and roared at him:

"How did your finger-prints come on this revolver, if my cousin committed suicide?"

Utterly without his volition—even without his knowledge that he was speaking—Philander's husky voice, scarcely audible even in the deathly silence of the room, gave forth the words:

"They couldn't be there—I wore gloves!"

Yellow Peril

HOW THE SCHOONER PROVIDENCE CAME NEAR HAVING HER
NAME ADDED TO THE LONG LIST OF SHIPS THAT
HAVE MYSTERIOUSLY DISAPPEARED IN
FAR EASTERN WATERS

By Eden Philpotts

THE schooner Providence, trading between Saigon and Manila, lay becalmed on her voyage from Cochin China to the Philippines. The crew, three men and a boy, were playing "all fours" in the shadow of the foresail. The master leaned against the wheel. He muttered to himself, and there was pain in his face. Smoke rose from the chimney of the galley, wherein Tan Ling, a Chinaman, cooked busily.

Presently Captain John Johns whistled, and Merry Masters, his mate, left the cards and went aft.

"Merry," said the skipper, "I'm took again—same old trouble of my innards. I shan't be able to eat no dinner, but something I must have. Just send Tan along, will you? I'll tell the man what to make for me."

The mate expressed regret and then went forward. After a few minutes Tan Ling, the Chinaman, appeared.

"Welly so'lly you ill again, cap'n. Me makee soft stuff, eh?"

Captain Johns, who suffered from a chronic affection of the stomach, explained the food he wanted, and Tan Ling listened and nodded thoughtfully. The cook was a tall, elderly man, very pallid and very plain. His mouth and his slanting eyes were mere slits in a putty-colored face. His pigtail was gray and thin. He was always bowing and smiling to his masters; but none hated foreign devils worse than Tan Ling, though few of his race had ever won more golden opinions from them. He was a good sailor and a good cook. His methods in the galley no man questioned or presumed to investigate, but his results all applauded.

Only accident had brought him to the Providence. He had consented to make a couple of voyages in her until he could find a better ship and better money; and John Johns, solicitous for his feeble digestion, gladly signed on the Chinaman and hoped that he would remain aboard.

Before the cook returned to his pots, Merry had left the galley and gone back where his mates sat under the limp fore-sail. They had finished their game of cards. They smoked and yarneled and whistled for the wind.

"It ain't offering," said Yankee West.

"And yet we might all of us make a mighty long voyage without a breath of wind this very night," answered Merry thoughtfully.

His voice was strange, and the other men looked at him.

"You're always for puzzles, my son," declared the oldest seaman of the crew; "yet I guess at your meaning. There's been some queer things happen in these waters the last six months. We was counting over 'em just now—me and West. We're lying this minute pretty near to where the John P. Greenleaf was seen for the last time."

"Ships beside her started and never made port," said Yankee; "yet no reason ever come to light why they shouldn't."

Old Tom Bond, the gray-haired ancient of the party, resumed the fascinating theme.

"Four of 'em as we know about. The Flying Fish, sister ship of this here schooner—she left Mindoro, as we might to-day, and instead of making Celebes she vanished off the sea with all hands forevermore. Then there was the Squib as

went into the Mindoro Sea and never come out again. Where be that ship now? And the Rangoon?"

"The Rangoon's boat was picked up, though," said West.

"So it was, with one dead sailor in it—and no natural death, neither. He'd a wound in his back and another in his belly. 'Twas reckoned the man had made off and tried to escape from a mutiny. H.M.S. Sheldrake cruised around for a month after that, but no man will ever see the Rangoon again. There's strange things happen among these reefs and banks."

"There was that French boat, the General Boulanger," piped the cabin boy. "She never got to port, though 'twas but a two days' voyage she went."

"Weather settled her, I believe," declared Merry. "It happened I knew some of her crew. She was terrible undermanned, and a very slow ship. The tail of a typhoon could tell us the end of her; but t'others—there's great mystery about 'em. They may be floating under other names and colors, perhaps in some pirates' nest Borneo way; or else they're all at the bottom of the sea by the hand of God."

"We'll never know," said Tom Bond.

"We may find out sooner than you think for," declared the mate, with a voice still full of mystery. "If there wasn't no such man as Merry Masters in this ship, the Providence might be the next sea wonder."

He was excited, and evidently labored under some unusual interest. They plied him with questions and raked the still sea with their eyes.

"Don't ask me naught," answered Masters. "Just wait and watch."

"What's biting you, boy?" asked Yankee. "You're as bad as the old man. I saw him rubbing his waistcoat again."

"He's a thought worse than usual; but mark me, there's one will suffer more than ever he has afore morning light. There'll be a human soul in a tighter fix than the cap'n's belly. And take heed to this—don't none of you chaps drink no tea nor coffee till I give the word! Not a mouthful, if you value your lives!"

"Well, I'm damned! What have you been drinking yourself?" asked another.

"Tisn't you will be damned, Williams, but somebody else. Say naught and don't drink naught till I give the word. Ah, there's cook!"

"Supper leddy," announced Tan Ling.

They rose and went below. It was Merry's watch, and he alone remained on deck, where he took the helm, while Captain Johns went into his cabin.

Presently Tan Ling appeared with a smoking bowl of soup for the skipper. Thereupon Mr. Masters whistled, and the cabin boy, with his mouth full, hurried up the ladder.

"Take the helm, Samuel," the mate hurriedly ordered. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

He dived after Tan Ling and entered the cabin.

"Welly good soup make cap'n plenty well," said Tan Ling. Then he turned to the mate. "Me keep your cully hot for you, Mr. Mate."

"That's all right, Yellowface. Keep it hot, and don't spare the curry powder."

"You likee eat fire," laughed the Chinaman, and disappeared.

Then Masters took the bowl from his captain's hand.

"Put that by, cap'n," he said. "The Lord's on this ship to-night, and, sinful man though I be, He's chosen me for His tool. Ask me naught, but don't drink a drop of that. I'll say nothing against anybody, but I'll say this—your weak stomach won't find nothing to suit it there."

Captain Johns sniffed at the bowl.

"What's wrong, Merry? I'm empty as a shotten herring," he said.

"Better bide so than touch that. Wait—wait just a little while. I ask no more. Then, if you want to drink, you shall."

"What do you know, Merry? What dark stuff's in your mind? What's happening aboard my ship? Tell me—'tis your duty!"

"Wait till night—only till night. I'm on the track of a trick blacker than night, I'll swear."

"Get my brandy bottle, then. That's safe drinking, anyway," said Mr. Johns.

Merry reached down a bottle and handed it to the skipper, who lay on his bunk.

"Wait for the middle watch," said the mate, "and promise, if you value your life, cap'n, not to touch that soup. Best let me put it overboard. Hell's loose on this ship to-night!" John Johns stared, and Masters departed with the drink.

II

NIGHT rushed down on the ship. The calm still held, but it was cloudy and unusually dark. In the middle watch a rift

broke in the sluggish clouds, and some celestial glimmer of fire flashed on the oily sea and then vanished. Then, suddenly, an awful yell, as of a man in agony, cut through the silence, and hardly was the ship's company on deck, in answer to Merry's whistle, when other cries resounded in the waist of the schooner.

A moment later Johns himself came from his cabin. He carried a lantern in one hand, a revolver in the other.

"What's this? What's this?" he cried.

"It's death aboard, sir," replied the mate.

A great silence had succeeded the screams of agony. Other lanterns were lighted, and Merry, Tom Bond, Williams, and the cabin boy began to search. The ship lay like a log on the black calm of the sea, and not a spar rattled.

"Where's Tan Ling?" shouted Johns. "Cook, where are you?"

"In hell," said Merry Masters. "That's where Yellowface is by now!"

A cry came from the boy.

"Lordy, look to this! Here's the Chink, humped up like a dead spider!"

Johns and Masters hastened to him. Yankee West and Williams were in the hold, and had not heard.

"Hide them awful eyes from me," said the captain. "They'd turn a tougher stomach than mine. He's dead, sure enough—an' never no nigger died uglier!"

"He's poisoned," explained Merry. "That's what's the matter with him, cap'n."

At the same moment a shout broke out of the stillness below.

"Here's the squealer! Here he is, dead as a rat!"

"Not there, my son!" shouted the mate. "He's here. The boy found him."

"We're not blind, whatever else we are," cried Yankee. "Here's Tan Ling down here, stone dead, an' all twisted, as if somebody been tying reef knots in the guy!"

They hastened down, to find the seamen with their lamps lowered and a yellow corpse lying in a distorted tangle at their feet. Masters knelt down and examined him.

"This isn't Tan Ling, but another Chink pretty near as big. Look here! That was meant for mischief, or I'm a sinner!" He pulled a long, heavy knife from under the Chinaman. "The sort of meat ax they chop heads off with," he said.

"How did he get aboard?" asked Captain Johns, staring down at the corpse.

A shout from the hold interrupted Bond's answer.

"Another of 'em—an' dead, too!"

Johns, who was an excitable man, dropped his lantern and began to curse and swear.

"What in hell's come to the ship? What blasted nightmare be this? Who done it, an' where the devil have these dead creatures rained from? Answer me, if anybody knows!"

"Look around, mates," said Merry Masters calmly. "There may be more of 'em, but, if there are, there's no call to be frightened now. I'll swear every ginger-faced murderer among 'em is as dead as the cook who got their supper. When you've hunted the ship, I'll tell you where we stand."

They made search high and low, but found nothing save the hiding places of the two dead men. They had been concealed behind heavy cases in the forehold, and it was clear that the sea wolves had been fed regularly in their secret den.

The three corpses were dragged on deck, and Merry explained the mystery.

"'Twas them or us, cap'n. When I went forward to the galley awhile ago, at your order, I walked with naked feet, and this here hyena didn't hear me. He was as busy as a cook need be about the curry we had for supper, and no heathen ever made a better, I should judge; but there was two great platters of rice afore him—one for himself, and one for the mess. Well, that's his way—they eat alone—an' I thought nothing of it; but suddenly over one plate he poured out the stuff from a half-pint bottle. I thought he'd give the other rice a drop, too, and made no doubt but 'twas some sauce as helped the victuals, but needn't be inquired into—for the less you know about the food those rats serve you, the better it'll go down. Well, Tan Ling didn't pour no stuff on the second plate, and he put the bottle very careful out of harm's way, in a pot that hangs from the galley ceiling. I wondered at that. Then I called him with my back turned, so as he shouldn't know I'd seen him cooking.

"'Cap'n wants you, Tan Ling,' I said. 'He's sick, an' you'll have to make him some soup, I reckon.'

"Off he goes, and me after him, but as soon as his back was turned I hopped into the galley an' just shifted the rice plates.

They was exactly alike, an' only the devil could have told which he'd doctored.

"If the stuff's harmless, no harm's done," said I to myself. "If it's poisoned, as I've a hunch, then 'tis a pity the right man shouldn't have it."

"But God judge me if I thought there was any more wretches aboard going to share his doom. However, the message was sent to me from aloft, and the whole thing's clear enough. They'd have fed us to the sharks this night and took the ship. Then they'd have nipped away into one of them hornets' nests of rascals down south. That's what happened to the Squib, and the Flying Fish, and more than one other forgotten ship as had Chinese aboard."

"Merry Masters," said Jolns, "I'm thinking you've saved our lives, my good lad; and I, for one, thank you, under God, for so doing. Never no ship got a better name than mine, come to think of it, for Providence was supercargo this voyage, if never afore! We ought to be righteous men henceforth. Pipe grog and praise the Lord!"

"Be you going to heave this yellow putty overboard, or keep it for a witness when we get ashore?" asked Merry.

"Keep 'em," answered the captain. "They'll hold a few hours till we make the nearest land, and then a doc can see what they died of. Now skip about, my sonnies—here's the wind!"

THIS LESSER WORLD

Clippity clap! Clippity clap!
Backward and forward—forward and back!
Such a terrible tumult in old Spinney Town
In the dark of the night when the sun had gone down!

Mrs. Cicada, days later confessed,
She sprained sounding boards, which she wore 'neath her chest;
Mr. Cicada, his five eyes distended,
Bored a deep well and swiftly descended!
Mrs. Field Cricket, with antennae trembling,
Screamed that wild wasps and ants were assembling;
So different from Nero was Mr. Field Cricket,
That he fled with his fiddle into a thick thicket!
Mrs. Black Beetle, stout forearms in clay,
Dismissed all her models and hid in some hay;
While Sacred, her husband, climbing backward a hill
With huge ball of meat, had a terrible spill!

Clippity clap! Clippity clap!
Backward and forward—forward and back!

Mrs. Glowworm, unlicensed for flight,
Was arrested for speeding without a tail light;
While Dr. Glowworm, bisecting a snail,
Rushed from his clinic, with face very pale!
Mrs. Green Mantis rose straightway from prayer,
Four rows of teeth gnashing, her eyes in a stare;
Preferring gray lizards to a cannibal wife,
Mr. Green Mantis ran hard for his life!

Clippity clap! Clippity clap!
It must be an army about to attack,
Raising a dust or yellow smoke screen
Which made all the baby grubs splutter and scream!

The Spider Patrol, on legs long and slender,
Came swiftly running with first aid to render;
The Bumble Brigade, buzzing bees of renown,
Arrived with their queen, who wore a gold crown:
And all this happened in Spinney Town, dears,
Because Uncle Centipede, veteran of years,
Had lost in past battles his very own legs
And strolled in the moonlight on hard wooden pegs!

Dorothy West

The Day and Age

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—IN THIS STORY THE PRESENT GENERATION AND THE PRECEDING ONE MEET IN A CRISIS THAT ONLY THOSE OF UNDERSTANDING HEARTS COULD TERMINATE

By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

THREE had been the clearest of crisp sunlight all the early morning, just such sunshine as a wedding day should have. Adele Waring accepted it as a matter of course.

The world for nineteen years had been full of joyful omens, confidently sweeping her into still more joyful fulfillments. She had not yet considered them at all; they were a part of life, coming as regularly as her breakfasts, accepted as casually.

But on this morning, the beginning of her wedding day, she stopped with a small gasp of emotion, a first recognition of how good life really was.

She opened her window wider, and looked out. There was no more vivid green than that of the young grass spreading down the hill; the yellow green of first foliage hung like fairy fringe—not yet anything half so sturdy as leaves, just a faintly-tinted feathery blur.

Just below, in the old garden, the cherry trees were set, teeming with white. They were fluffy, cottony masses, each branch waving soft whiteness into the sunshine. The pear trees closer to her unfolded their tinted petals as she looked; a yellow flowering currant bush was aflame.

A thrush spread his wings from close by, but before he went he spoke his four clear notes, silver with tenderness, thrilling with rapture.

Adele was not given to sentimentalizing over spring days. They, too, were part of her very satisfactory world, but it occurred to her that she was happy that morning, and that her wedding day should be happy too.

It was almost as if the morning itself un-

derstood how wonderful Rex was, and how full and fine her life with him was to be. There was a dark-blue, thick line against the western horizon that gave only added contrast to the brilliant early day.

That is, at first it was only a contrast, to show the glory more fully; but the line thickened, and before the morning mail was opened it was no longer a line, but had caught the sun behind it. Then it flashed intermittently, and growled dull thunder.

"I hope it doesn't rain," Adele said plaintively, and her sister Janet turned from gathering up the string, the tissue paper, and the ribbons that the latest gifts had left in their wake. She smiled at the bride.

"It's April, dear," she said. "A shower will make it all the sweeter for evening."

"Do you like rain on a wedding day?" said Adele, drawing her straight bows together.

"Oh, I shouldn't notice it," answered Janet easily. "I'd be glad it came early in the day, and got itself over."

Just then a blue flash ripped through the room. Above their heads there was the roaring crackle of a close lightning stroke. The room was for a second full of a bright blue light that quivered. Adele, leaning against the piano, heard the strings tingle.

She threw her arms over her face. "Oh! Janet!" she cried. "Oh!" Janet pulled her sister to her.

"That certainly was a sharp one. You never liked the lightning, did you? There comes the rain, Adele. Don't mind. It will be all over in a few minutes, and we'll have a bright day."

Adele crowded into the encircling arm. "It struck something, didn't it?" she quavered. Janet gave her a little shake.

"Maybe, Silly. But it didn't strike Rex. I suppose it sounded to you as if it were aimed at him. There he comes now, foolish girl. He will be good and wet. Run let him in, Adele."

Adele sped to the door, and Janet Waring swept into her hands the last of the wedding wrappings, her lower lip caught tightly in her teeth, her chin working.

II

THE last year had been so full of events that Janet was whirled through the flood of them without time to consider what they would mean.

In the big old house at the far end of the shaded street there had been a tragedy which no one else had known, and which she had faced with lips that smiled, and head always erect. There were days to come when she need not smile, but they had not yet come.

Janet Waring had been the father-mother-family for her sister, who remembered no one but her. Janet at ten had mothered Adele at six, had followed her father and mother to the family lot beyond the hill, had poured happiness before Adele, had adored her, and been adored in return.

She had not known that Adele was grown until the day when she saw a sudden new look in Rex Danby's eyes. Those eyes—their lights and friendliness—had been hers when Adele was playing with dolls.

When Rex had gone to the city to try his luck there, it had been with the understanding that some day Janet was to go too, if he did not come back. He did not come back except at intervals, when he was full of the success he was making, when he told her by the hour of what he had done and was going to do, of the swing of the big city, of what a young man could do there when he was earnest and determined.

There had been no definite promise for anything, but life had been very certain and smooth until she looked at him one day and found his eyes aflame, and turned to see that he was looking at Adele.

The whole story told itself to Janet that day. There was no later installment; she saw it all in that preface.

The rest was easy—just to watch and to fold and to bury anything of her own that could stand between Adele and what she might want. And Rex, looking keenly at her on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion, saw nothing to mar the joy that stood in front of him. He said hesitatingly:

"I'm sure you approve, Janet," and she had given him a straight, smiling look as clear as Adele's. Janet was handsome, with oddly level brown eyes, where he had looked that day, searching them with curiosity. He had been satisfied with what he saw.

The wedding day had been hurried; very soon they would be gone to the city, and Janet would no longer need to be a play actor.

III

ADELE flung open the front door, and Rex came across the veranda out of the rain. He put down his umbrella, stepped inside, and closed the door without speaking. Then he put both arms about her.

"You sweetest thing in the world," he said at her ear.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came!" she cried. "Isn't this a dreadful storm? Do you think it will be nice by night? I should hate to be married in a storm. What shall we do if it storms during the ceremony? I should feel it was a bad sign, wouldn't you? Do you think it will?"

"I think it will not, dear love," he said. "It's breaking away already in the west. Just a shower. It will be all the finer."

"Not a bad sign, is it, Rex?"

"Bad nothing! And it's right at the beginning, anyhow. If we are going to quarrel, Adele, we will have to do it early in the game if the omen is to be carried out—then sunshine afterward."

She looked soberly at him, and he laughed and touched the point of her chin with a finger.

"Don't you want to see the marriage license," he whispered mysteriously.

Adoringly he watched the flush that crept up her cheeks, where her lids drooped over the light in her eyes.

"Oh, let me see it!" she cried.

They bent together over the paper.

"Adele Waring, age nineteen; Rex Danby, age thirty," read Adele. "It seems quite a lot of difference. Are you sure you will be satisfied with me as young as that?"

"I dare say you will grow older," he teased her.

"But so will you."

"No. I shall stand still and wait for you. Adele, how did it happen that you cared for me?"

"Oh, how did it happen that *you* cared for *me*?" she answered the old, old question asked through all ages.

Throughout the rest of Adele's wedding day there was a beating back and forth of sunshine and storm. When the guests were gathering, gusts of sharp rain slapped their faces; but when Adele came down the stairs a round moon above a cloud peered in as if to see her beauty.

Just before they were leaving, when the crowd was waiting at the foot of the stairs for the bride's bouquet, Janet put out a hand and drew Rex into the disorder of the dining room.

She smiled in her friendly way, but her voice shook.

"Just a minute, Rex. Be patient with her, won't you? I—I have spoiled her. I've seen it very plainly the last few weeks. I have spoiled her because I have led her. She is easily influenced.

"She will follow where you lead; you can make of her what you like just now. I think she will have plenty of backbone after awhile; father and mother both had, and I have—"

She hesitated, and laughed a little. "But right now, being taken away from me, she will depend on you. Start her right, Rex. She is very dependent—very sweet—" Her voice broke.

"Sure," he answered heartily. "Bless you, Janet! I'll take care of her—sweetest thing that ever lived. I realize it, you good girl. You have shown her every step. I know that, and I'll try and do the same. How soon will you come to us and see how I am carrying out the trust? Come soon, Janet, will you?"

"Oh, yes," she said hastily. "Very soon. But she must learn to work out her own life. I wish I had taught her that. But you do it."

He looked curiously at her. She was clutching her fingers together.

"Good-by, Janet," he said, and dropped her hand to go out and find Adele tilting on the top step, the roses on her hat matching her cheeks, poisoning her bouquet over the crowd below.

Rex Danby remembered the quake in Janet's voice, and he told himself a dozen times daily through the first weeks of his marriage that Adele was to be looked after, guarded, guided, but taught to develop her own strength in her own way in the meantime—sheltered always, as Janet had said.

But he told himself, too, that Adele would soon be quite independent, for she took up the interests in the new apartment with enthusiasm, and showed immediate, surprising, and amusing resources.

Rex had taken an apartment which overlooked Gramercy Square.

"Location is so much," he told Adele. "We must do with less room, and insist upon the proper locality."

It was what he called a "walk-up," but after they had climbed four flights of stairs, there was an enticing view into tree tops quite like those Adele had left behind. They were far enough up to escape the surface noise, and Adele was delighted with her four rooms, and played at her housekeeping with bubbling joy.

The mysteries of the kitchenette, the placing of the wedding gifts, the problems connected with the closets, to say nothing of the tangles of cooking recipes, were more absorbing than any former task had ever been.

"This is play housekeeping," she told Rex gravely. "I had no idea it was so easy. Janet used to spend long hours in the kitchen, and make the greatest fuss about the cleaning. Now, you see how easily I do it, don't you?"

"Yes, love, as long as the delicatessen shops stay in business, you will be all right. You are some housekeeper, Adele. Look here, now that we are settled, I want to have a bunch of friends come in and see my lovely wife."

"Oh, yes indeed!" she cried, flushing with proprietorship. "Oh, do! I am only afraid they won't like me, will they? What kind are they?"

He drew her to his knee.

"I have been wondering how you will like them. There is no question about how they will like you. You see, love, you were born and reared upcountry, and always sheltered by Janet; and these people are New Yorkers. They are up-and-coming."

"And am I not up-and-coming?" she asked anxiously.

"You bet you are, but you don't know what they know. For instance, Janet has

taken care of you so well that you probably couldn't swallow a cocktail without strangling, and you don't know how to smoke a cigarette. I'll teach you."

"Smoke? Teach me to smoke? The women don't really smoke much, do they?"

"Well, they do. If they feel like it, they do."

"I hope they won't feel like it when they come here," she said primly.

Rex laughed and kissed her.

"This is the city, dear. Let them do as they like."

She considered. "But you don't want me to smoke, do you?"

He looked at her critically.

"Don't believe I do. I like your mouth better without tobacco. But you must not mind what they do. It is like this, dear: we will live our lives as we like, but must let them live theirs as they like. See?"

With great excitement Adele prepared for the evening when Rex would introduce her to "the bunch," as he called the small clique with whom he had been intimate before his marriage. He told her about them.

"There is John Marsh and Angie," he told her. "They have been married four years, and he says they have lived two thousand dollars over their income every year. They haven't hit it off together very well. It's her fault; Angie is too fond of ease. I'll bet her kitchenette is more crowded than yours—if that were possible.

"Then there are Paul Strobie, and Grace Winter. They haven't married because he hasn't stopped talking long enough. If any one will listen to Strobie, he'll talk all night—pretty interesting talk, too. That's how Grace got him listed, by letting him talk."

"But you will like Perry Grant. Just now he's flirting a bit with Angie Marsh, but he doesn't mean anything, and neither does she. They are all good sports, Adele. All older than you, by a lot, and you will be a new element. They'll be crazy about you."

Adele was inclined to be afraid of these friends who were coming. She debated long about her gown, and substituted a pink one for a white, because the first made her look too young.

IV

HER throat was tight, and there was more hesitancy than hospitality in the way

she came forward to greet them. She was conscious of their more than casual interest. The men all looked at her. The two women wore lorgnettes dangling jinglingly from chains that glittered as they put them up to look at Adele.

They were confident of each other's interests, and at once the talk slipped into channels along which Rex went with more familiarity than she did. She sat a little stiffly, and caught an occasional quick breath as she listened.

She liked Paul Strobie best, for he came to her chair, smiled down at her, and after a minute of generalities, said confidentially:

"Why do you catch those short breaths all the time?"

He must think her very young, or he would not have said that. No one at home would have spoken of her short breaths if they had been noticed. She looked up resentfully, but his smile disarmed her.

"I think I'm frightened," she said before she knew it.

"Of us?" with another smile.

"Yes. You know how to do things, and I don't. You see, I'm from the country, and I don't know about these places they are talking about.

"I've been to a lot of theaters. Rex likes me to go, and I love them, but I don't know about the other things. So every little bit, I think how foolish I must seem, and then I get panicky. That's when I catch my breath."

"This great knowledge that we seem to have," he said, settling himself beside her, and fencing her off from the others by his broad back; "this knowledge is just the surface kind.

"It is just locality knowledge of the city that impresses strangers, and is really nothing at all worth while. You can give these people cards and spades on knowing things."

He stopped and looked hard at her, then said:

"You are a serious person, are you not?"

"Oh, no, only when I am frightened."

When he sauntered away from her, he bent over Miss Winter. She put up a scarlet shoe, struck a match on the sole, and lighted a cigarette. Adele could not hear what Strobie said to her, but they both laughed, and she flamed, wondering if they were talking about her.

As the hours slipped by, Adele felt that she had been inspected and found wanting. And as she thought, she stiffened more in her chair, her throat was more tight, her ideas more muffled.

* They did not insist upon drawing her out, after they had made occasional efforts to include her in their conversation, perfunctory attempts that lapsed until some one else happened to think of her.

The rooms seemed a little small for so much smoke, and it made her faintly sick. Then she was startled at the number of small glasses that were filled and emptied.

Rex seemed to know how to do everything very well. He looked remarkably handsome as he went about filling the glasses, laughing, and stopping to pat her shoulder, or to lean forward and take her hand. The first time he did that there was a shout of laughter, and a bandying about of foreign words that she did not understand.

She flushed and drew away her hand, but Rex captured it again, and defied their badinage. After she had refused the first glass with a shake of her head, he did not offer her another.

She sat almost the whole evening in the same chair, wondering how late they would stay. They talked loudly, and the later it was the louder they talked.

Once she saw Perry Grant let his hand fall on Mrs. Marsh's bare shoulder. She was sure he was pressing it; she could see the muscles of his hand tighten there on the white flesh. This first introduction to her husband's friends was not a pleasant occasion.

There was one good thing about it; they did not mind her in the least. They chattered over and around her, remembering once in awhile to address her pointedly, and then she would grow hot and would stammer. She wondered if Rex were disappointed in her.

She felt better when John Marsh told her good night after his wife had gone ahead with Grant.

"My dear," he said to her, "it is many a day since I have seen as beautiful a young woman as you are."

He said it nicely, and she felt a quick glow. Then he stumbled over a rug and against the door. There was a shout of laughter.

"That last was one too many, Jack," some one called, and she had the quick

knowledge that they thought he had been drinking too much. They did not drink too much where she came from; and the idea chilled her.

Rex was silent as he helped her pick up the glasses and carry them out, as they straightened the chairs and gathered up the ash trays. She wondered again if he were disappointed, and if he thought his friends did not like her.

So she asked him. It had always been her habit to ask when she wanted to know anything.

"Do you think they liked me, Rex?"

"They could not help it, dear," he said gently. "They all said how lovely you are."

"Yes, but do they think I'm stupid? Do you think they thought I was stupid?"

"No. You were quiet, but you will get over that. Of course it was hard for you. You will enter into their interests better later. You will get on better with them next time."

She faced him.

"Rex," she said in a hushed voice, "I saw Mr. Grant with his hand on Mrs. Marsh's shoulder. He squeezed it, and her husband saw and did not care—Mr. Marsh was drunk when he went away."

"His eyes were glassy. Miss Winter held that other man's hand, and they all drank. Rex, I don't know how to talk to people who act that way."

"Nonsense," he said brusquely.

She reached her hand to him, but he frowned and did not take it.

She shrank against the door of the little dining room, the back of her hand pressed over her mouth!

V

JANET WARING turned from the wide window in Adele's drawing-room and held out her hand to Perry Grant. She flushed as she did it, and the last level rays of the winter sun struck directly into the new glow in her face.

Janet had changed scarcely at all in the fifteen years that had passed since she had charged Rex Danby to stand between Adele and all rough spots that her future might hold.

She had been thinking, as she stood staring out on the ice-specked river beyond the Drive, that very soon, now, there would be the flush of spring over the old-fashioned yard at the country place.

Maybe she had been thinking it would be possible a little later, when spring had really come, for her to go up there for a month and be quite alone, to pick up in solitude some of the interests and some of the peace that she had left so many years before.

She had not been able to manage many visits there alone since she had followed Adele to the city. Nearly every summer she had gone back with Adele; the summer the baby was a year old had been their first visit, and they had been very happy with Rex running up often during the still, golden days.

Almost every summer since they had gone, and it was the high spot in young Mary's life. Janet rejoiced in the pull that the old place had for the child. But she'd love to go back alone just once. Maybe it could be managed this year.

She had been staring dully out of the window, her fingers drumming on the sill, until she heard Perry Grant's voice. Then came the flush that whipped back her obscured youth.

"I dare say you are serving tea this afternoon," he said, holding her hand despite its little effort to get away.

"Always," she answered.

"Where has every one gone?" He let go the fingers that were persistent for escape.

"Adele went to see some pictures, and took Mary with her. Won't you sit in the window? I like it best there. The ice is really softening on the river. I was just thinking about it, and that spring was on its way again."

"I can't see why Adele should go to see pictures," he said. "If she looks in the mirror any time she sees a picture that blanks all others."

"Yes, isn't she lovely?" and Janet raised her chin quickly. "She has grown more lovely each year, hasn't she?"

"Yes. She has shown Time that there is one woman he cannot deface. I am not sure but there are two such women; when I look at the red lights the sun streaks through your hair, Janet, I line you up with Adele."

"Then I shall stay in the sun if anything puts me on a line with Adele."

There was nearly a challenge in her tone, and he looked at her curiously.

"You have the protective instinct. You fluster up ready for argument when a word

is said of her, even in the most flattering way."

She shot a quick glance at him. He wondered why she looked startled, but he had wondered that often in the ten years that she had been a member of her sister's household. There was nothing new in that almost defiance of Janet's. He saw it constantly, and it had remained unexplained through his intimacy with them all.

"Rex in yet," he asked.

"No, but he soon will be."

"Rex moves by clockwork. That is why he has advanced at his stirring gait. I wish I were not such a lazy hound. I wish it every time I come here and see what Rex has given his family in so short a time.

"Now I have the same old surroundings and a not much larger bank account than I had fifteen years ago. Rex and I started about even. He has left me out of sight behind him.

"There is no one in the legal profession in this great city who is better known. Not all luck, either, Janet; not all ability, either. Much of it has been his determination, the way in which he has tackled life with his jaw set."

She nodded.

He turned suddenly close to her as she sat on the broad sill.

"Janet, what's the use? I can't make talk with you. I promised to stay on the platonic platform, but I can't do it. Why should I? Because I am forty is no reason why I cannot be swept off my feet, and stay swept off.

"You made me promise not to talk this way. Well, I'm breaking the promise. I think I always will break it.

"Look here; if you will say positively that you do not care for me, I can, perhaps, keep still. You never have said that. You have just said 'Don't,' and that has kept me from despairing altogether. A diet of 'don't' for ten years; isn't that rather hard on a man, Janet?"

She looked away.

"You promised not to speak of this again."

"Of course I promised. Well, I have broken it. Now what are you going to do?"

She did not answer, and he came closer, looking strangely eager for a man whose hair was fast graying, looking strangely young and ardent.

"Janet, if you will say that you do not care for me, I will stop all this. You won't say it unless it is true, I know. Say it, Janet."

Still she did not answer, and his low laugh was full of tenderness that had a triumphant note.

"You can't! You don't lie; you are not built that way. Janet, love me. Don't fence me off with that odd silent refusal. We could find all the heaven that life ever has."

"I could; and so could you, for you won't say that you don't like me. A home somewhere, Janet—just us. It's the biggest thing life holds. I promise to make you happy if love can do it."

His voice held a break in it, and she turned swiftly to put her hand on his.

"Don't. I can't marry you; no matter if I wanted to very much, I can't."

"Why not? This is the hundredth time I have asked you. Don't I deserve an answer? Why not?"

"I can't tell you now."

"Can you ever tell me?"

"Oh, I hope so! But I can't tell you now."

There was such pain in her voice that he straightened, and patted her shoulder lightly.

"All right, dear. Don't mind. I'll wait. But remember that I'm waiting and wanting you. Don't ever forget that. Don't worry now. How soon will Adele be in?"

She flashed him a grateful glance.

"Oh, almost at once, I should think. They like to be in when Rex comes. You know it is a family tradition that Adele and Mary are here when Rex comes."

As she finished speaking, there was the sound of running feet outside the door. It flew open. No one entered. Janet rose and clutched the folds of her gown. There was a brief, silent pause, and over everything the feeling of waiting.

Then Adele's daughter, slim and tall for fourteen years, called gayly.

"Hello, Uncle Perry! How about that picture you were taking me to see to-day? There is plenty of time before dinner."

Mary Danby had her mother's dark eyes; her hair waved back from her forehead just as her father's did. She had a defiant poise, and a certainty of knowing what she wanted or did not want that was also his.

"You are a little late keeping your en-

gagement with me," said Perry Grant, shaking her hand with the formality that delighted her, because it made her feel so grown up.

"That is one of your mother's traits—to keep the world waiting. You can afford to do that, of course, being a young but rapidly growing woman. It must be delightful, Mary, to keep people waiting and make them like it."

"Where is your mother?"

Janet, still standing, asked the question; and just then Adele came in, her fur coat trailing from her shoulders, her face vividly beautiful under her black hat.

She crossed to the tea table, and the silver and china rattled under her fingers.

"I'm glad you're here, Perry. Janet was letting you perish of thirst, wasn't she? What's the matter with this caddy, Janet? The top sticks hideously."

Janet took it from her.

"Take off your things," she said evenly. "I'll do this."

Janet bent her head over the table, and Adele shook her coat from her shoulders and stood straight and tall, her cloth gown distinctive in its severeness. She crossed to the fire and leaned against the mantel.

"First, it seems very hot and stuffy in here, and I wonder why Janet does not air the place; and then it seems drafty and cold, and I wonder why she does not have more heat. It's annoying to feel that way. It's confusing. Where's Rex?"

Perry Grant took a cup from Janet and watched to see if she would lift her eyes. She did not.

"When I was first in business," he said cheerfully, "it was in an office where there was a time clock that recorded the hour of arrival of every employee."

"I suggest one for this house. Every one asks with his first breath where the others are. It is 'Where is your mother?' from Janet. Then it is 'Where is Rex?' from you."

"A time clock would be a vast saving for you all. I never saw a family before that needed one; but you are all abnormally eager as to each other's whereabouts."

"That is domestic bliss, Perry," said Adele. "Don't you know it when you see it?"

She shook her head at Janet's proffered cup, and then, when Janet spoke a low "Please," she took it and smiled.

"They feed me all the time, too, Perry,"

she said plaintively. "One would think I were a child. I don't always like it."

"Then you mustn't look like one," he answered. "It's really shameful, Adele, how you flout time. Look at her, Janet. Mary, look at your mother. We know that color isn't out of a box, and she was pale just a minute ago. How do you do it, Adele?"

"Aunt Janet is going with us to the picture when we go," hinted Mary, impatient of the absurdity of tea.

Perry Grant put down his cup.

"We are ready to start. Will you come too, Adele?"

She shook her head. She had left the fireplace and gone to the window, then she crossed the room again, head erect, moving with swift, light steps, color coming and going, her eyes very bright. She ran her fingers through the shining coils of her hair, and it fell back loosely, still more striking in its new waves.

He saw Janet's gaze on her, and then saw it lowered under his own.

"Come on, Janet," he said casually. He was struck, as he had been many times, by a strangeness in the atmosphere, by a tension that he had never understood. He had wondered at the strain he sometimes felt in that household. Usually it was not there, but sometimes it dominated the luxury and the affection. It dominated just then.

"Go without me to-night," said Janet. "Run along, Mary. I'll go some other time."

No one protested. Mary was quite unmoved. Adele said:

"Come soon again, Perry," and he looked into Janet's level eyes a question that brought no answer.

They met Rex at the door as they went out. He was distinctly better looking after fifteen years of successful work. Not that he had ever lacked self-confidence, but it had grown to be of more artistic value because of the filled-out angles. He was distinguished looking; age had added to his satisfactory personality.

"Is this an elopement?" he asked.

"Oh, don't stop us, father," and Mary's voice had a delicate birdlike note that made people smile. She waved him aside a bit anxiously, for Rex had his own ideas about his daughter's bringing up.

"We refuse to recognize you," said Perry. "Your business is not with us.

They are inquiring ardently about you in the house. Please don't delay us."

VI

REX DANBY carried his easy poise and his satisfaction as far as the front hall. He laid it aside with his overcoat, and there was a new manner—one that his business associates would not have known—when he met Janet on the stairs.

She would have passed him swiftly with only a smile of greeting, but he caught her arm.

"Nothing the matter?"

He said it stealthily, a line suddenly showing between his eyes.

She answered in the same tone.

"I'm not sure. I was afraid; don't notice it unless you must."

"Has she been with Grace Strobie?"

"I don't know. I didn't dare ask her."

Impatiently, with a word or two under his breath, he shook off the hand with which she touched him.

Then he went on and turned into the drawing-room.

Adele was sitting in a low chair by the fire. Its lights flickered over her, struck glints from the buckles on her smart shoes.

He stood in front of her after he had flashed on the lights. She put her hand up over her eyes.

"That is so bright," she protested. "I like the firelight better."

He looked sharply at her, and she moved restlessly. Neither spoke for a moment; then she rose and put out a hand.

"Don't stare at me like that! Don't you sometimes think that a different way of treating me would be better?"

Still he did not speak, and she went on:

"There's no reason for you to stare at me—to-night."

"Truly, Adele?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Would I lie about it—especially as it would be so easy for you to find out?"

He snapped off the lights, drew a chair close, and sat down, his elbows on his knees, looking hard at the glowing center of the fire. His wife watched him. As the coals parted and sent brighter flashes over his face, they brought out the line between his eyes, the tense corners of his mouth.

She put out her hand and touched his shoulder.

"Poor Rex," she said softly. "I have

not made your life all peaches and cream, have I?"

"We both know that I'm to blame," he said. She shivered.

"Don't let us talk about that! Anyhow, Rex—anyhow, it's over. We won't have it again."

He did not answer nor look at her, and she took away her hand.

"Your silence throws cold water. If you believed in me a little more, perhaps it would help. I know what you think, that you have heard those words many times. Don't talk about it. Don't let me talk about it."

"Adele, darling, you'll hate this, but I wish you didn't see Grace Strobie so much."

Her head went up.

"She was your friend, Rex. I hope you remember! Oh—I'm sorry—I shouldn't have said that!"

"No, you shouldn't. I have enough blame to bear."

"Rex, if you wouldn't be so quick to take offense; if you wouldn't treat me as if I were a child; not—not try to run everything yourself—even select my friends for me."

"I have a reason for not wanting you to be with Grace Strobie. Shall I tell you the reason?"

She sprang up.

"No, don't tell me! Please not. I must dress for dinner. So must you. Mary will be back soon."

He turned and stooped to kiss her, but she drew away and laughed, fencing him off with one finger. Instantly the line between his eyes was a furrow, and the eyes themselves were keen, searching.

She dropped her look before them, and flushed.

"Don't stare at me," she said, and went swiftly out.

After dinner, when Mary had gone upstairs, Rex and Janet were alone in the drawing-room.

He turned fiercely to her.

"To live year after year under the edge of a catastrophe, wears one out, Janet," he said.

"I wonder how long before we can feel secure," she answered. She had never expressed any such wonder before.

"It nails you to the cross too, doesn't it, dear sister? I couldn't have lived but

for you. As I look back over the last ten years, I marvel that together we could have done what we have; we have kept our calamity within our own house—more, we have kept it absolutely from Mary.

"She has never had a flicker of the thing. I wonder, too, how long it will be before we feel secure. I have gained confidence, Janet. Haven't you?"

"Yes. She has been restless the last few days, the first time for so long. But I believe it is nothing."

Then the door opened, and Mary came in.

"Has mother another of her headaches? I wanted to see her; but her door is locked, and she didn't answer when I called."

The eyes of the man and woman met. Janet was the one to answer.

"Yes, her head ached, and she has gone to bed. Don't disturb her, Mary."

As the door closed, the two on the hearth rug faced each other.

"Again," said Rex Danby stiffly.

VII

MARY lingered about the room after breakfast the next morning.

"I would like to see mother before I go to school," she said anxiously. "I think she might let me in just to see her a minute. She lets you in when she has her headaches, Aunt Janet. I don't see why she can't admit me. I'm not a baby. I know better than to talk to her. I just want to see her."

Neither Rex nor Janet, at the breakfast table, looked up. Janet answered without raising her gaze from her plate:

"Run along, Mary. Your mother is asleep just now. She will be better by night."

The girl was putting on her hat in the doorway.

"Aunt Janet," she said slowly, "sometimes I think there's something queer about my mother's headaches."

Then Janet raised her head and laughed lightly—a laugh at variance with the tenseness of her face.

"Headaches are queer things, child. Very soon now you will be taking care of her in my place, then you will know what dire things they are. Run along. We will come for you with the car."

When the closing of the front door echoed through the house, Rex rose and stood in front of his sister-in-law.

"Well, it has come," he said very low. "The thing we have dreaded, the time when Mary would ask questions."

He took several turns across the room. Janet sat silently, hands clasped before her.

"How is she now?" he asked.

"I don't know. I can't get in to find out."

"She bolted the door?"

"Yes."

"I will go in by the balcony."

"You can't. I tried. She has bolted the windows."

"Then I'll break the glass."

"Yes. I waited to see what you thought best to do."

"I'm almost sure that it is Grace Strobie who does this. I can think of no other way. There is no man who would do it for her."

"Oh, no, no, Rex!"

"And Grace needs the money. What shall I do? I've hinted. I've almost told her. Shall I tell her? Shall I go to Grace?"

"Wait, Rex. Wait once more. Oh, my dear boy, wait once more."

She rose then, and there was in her little of the Janet of the previous day who had flushed and laughed. Sleeplessness spoke from her circled eyes, her skin was gray and drawn, there was not a line of her face that did not speak distress and fear.

Rex Danby showed all the emotions that had changed her, but he showed, too, anger, and something from which Janet looked away, because the determination there was a thing she had been fearing from him.

"Let me take care of it, Rex," she said gently. "You go to the office and let it alone with me."

Anger flamed in his face, and resentment that was against her too.

"Let it alone!" he repeated. "Let it alone, and then again alone, and again. I have let it alone for ten years. It is beyond belief that this should go on and on."

"Oh, don't!" She shielded her face with one hand.

"You want it to go on, knowing that Mary has asked her first question? You want her life spoiled, too, as yours and mine have been? I tell you, Janet, this is the last. There must be something done."

He turned to the door, then came back to where she sat, and spoke more gently:

"I don't want to hurt you. Don't I

know that you have sacrificed your life; that you have set aside every want of your own to help me take care of her, and cover up this thing? I could never have done it but for you.

"If I had tried to shield her alone, my future would have been ruined by what is going on here at home. You've understood that it must not be known, and you have stood between me and professional scandal and ruin.

"Don't think I don't appreciate it. You've done it for love of her, but do you want it to go on now that Mary has noticed? Do you want her to go through what we have gone through?"

"Rex—as we have asked each other a thousand times—what can we do?"

"I know what to do. We will send Mary away with you, and I'll carry this thing alone. I'll settle her—somewhere, with attendants, and give out that she is ill.

"You take Mary some place where she can go on with her studies, and you can take the place of her mother. After ten years, Janet, we both know that details are really in our minds ready to be carried out."

"All details but one, that she will not give Mary up."

"She must." Janet shrank from the hardness speaking through the voice that had been so kindly.

"Will you talk with her once again about it when she—is able?"

He turned back once more from the door, drawn by the hopelessness in her tone.

"Janet, I want to do right. As far as I can I'll help and be kind to her, but we've reached the dividing line. You should see it. You do."

"Yes, I do. But let us talk to her—you alone first."

They shook hands gravely.

"To-night," he said.

But the door of Adele's room was not opened that night or the next, except by Janet, who went in and out.

But the third night, Adele sat in her place at dinner. Her shoulders rose like ivory from the pink of her gown. She was eager about a new play opening that night, about some millinery displays for the next day. She laughed when she tipped over a glass of water; her color rose and sank, and rose again.

Perry Grant came in before dinner was over, and Adele was the gayest about the fireplace with the coffee cups.

"I have tickets in my pocket for the first-night performance," said Grant. "That is, I have three tickets—all I could get; and I'm sorry to say that I paid a premium on those. Now who will make the other two; I've agreed to write something really good about it."

"I'm out," said Rex. "I'm tired."

"Take Janet," said Adele. Then she caught sight of Mary's eager eyes and parted lips. "Mary may go. This is Friday, and there are no lessons to-morrow. Would you like to go, love?"

"Oh, mother! You are the sweetest thing! But don't you care? You were talking about the new play."

"I don't care at all. I want to visit with your father." Adele lifted her chin, and smiled across at her husband.

VIII

WHEN they had gone out, she waited only until she had watched them down the street; then she held out both hands.

"One more forgiveness, Rex!" There was a silver sweetness in her voice; but he put aside her hands.

"We are at the end of this, Adele. Mary has said that your headaches are queer. She is no longer a child, and she must be protected."

"It shall not happen again, Rex."

"It shall not be given a chance to happen again."

She looked at him, and there was no fear and no challenge in the look. She had always been sure of his devotion. He was impatient sometimes, when she—failed him, but his love for her was there. So she waited, standing, looking wistful and frail enough to stir his quick sympathy.

"Adele, we have waited a long time for you to break the thing that has almost broken us. Each year has made it harder because of Mary. Janet and I have fenced you off from the rest of the world, but we cannot fence you off from Mary. She must know soon that her mother is—" He hesitated.

"Say it! She must know it, you say. Must she know, too, that her father taught me to drink?"

She had launched that accusation at him before; had shielded herself behind his part in the condition.

"I have paid bitterly for my share," he said, his face growing pale. "If it is my fault, as you have said, certainly I have paid the hardest price."

She flamed at him.

"The hardest price? How do you know? Haven't I cared? Oh, how little you know! I remember the first time you urged me to drink so that I might not be a wet blanket on the frolics of your friends.

"The first drink strangled me, and you laughed. I can see you now—how you laughed because it burned my mouth and throat. I'll never forget the first taste that you handed me. And when I choked, you said to try again.

"Of course you didn't suppose I would be lashed to it later on. You were shocked the first time you found out that I had bought it and had it in my room. I didn't like it at first! It hurt my throat! I didn't want it. You gave it to me. The whole fault is yours!"

She was crying then, and shaking. He took a step toward her, and then fell back.

"We've gone over all this, Adele. Heaven knows I've paid. Now what of Mary? Are you going to hurt her, too? How will she feel when she knows what was the matter when we called it 'headaches'?

"I wonder that we could have kept it from her so long. Janet has stood in front of her, and to do it Janet has given up her own chance of happiness. She will not marry Perry because of you."

"She doesn't want to marry him."

"Oh, Adele!"

She walked back and forth across the room, and then, going to him, put both hands on his shoulders.

"Rex, give me another chance."

"I? Yes. For me you can have another chance and another and another, but not for her."

"How—"

He interrupted her.

"You mean another chance to try and break this habit?" She nodded. "As long as I live I'll wait for you to do it, but Mary can't wait. Try again, Adele, and I'll help; but we must get Mary out of it."

"Out of it?" She gasped the question.

"Janet and I have talked it over. We want you to agree to let Janet take Mary and put her in school in Paris for a couple of years. You and I will try this thing again alone."

"A couple of years!" she cried incredulously. "Separated from Mary for a couple of years!"

"You must."

"Not years, Rex! Not years!"

"We must be sure that there will be nothing more for her to see before she comes back."

She clung to him.

"Rex, send me to one of those places where they cure. I've tried alone. Send me."

"You know I can't. Those things are always known. The blemish would stick to her. And what would it do to me professionally, if it was known that my wife was in such a place? No. You must do this yourself, and—and I'm beginning to believe that you can't do it."

"Oh, I can—I can, if you won't take her away!"

"Then why haven't you? You have known it could not go on; it is too strong for you."

"Oh, it is not! I'll do it! Surely I wouldn't let a thing like that stand between me and my little girl. Knowing what you will do, I'm sure it could not happen again. It never will. Rex—give me another chance."

He hesitated.

"Just once more," she begged. "And then, if I don't keep my word, I'll not beg again. I know as well as you do that she must not know. I'll win now. I know you will do as you say, if I am not all right."

"Yes, I'll do as I say."

"Will you wait for one more trial?"

"Oh, Adele," he groaned, "can I trust you?"

"Oh, you can! You can!"

"Adele, if I'm to chance Mary once more, let's work together for success. Let's forgive each other, and have a fresh start. Let's forget the cause and the result. Can we? I want to try again as bad as you do. But if you fail, Adele—if I knew that Grace Strobie was getting it for you—"

She put her hand over his lips.

"Hush! We have forgotten. Poor Grace. Don't drag her in."

"Will you stay away from her?"

"Oh, yes! I won't remember her now. We've forgotten and started again!"

IX

FORGETTING was easily managed. Spring flooded the country with beauty, but with

no more beauty than flooded in along the channel of Adele's determination.

Perry Grant noticed the change as mysterious as the something that had before defied him. Adele and Rex took long swift rides together as they had done before any shadow came between them; Mary only knew that home was delightful, and Janet lost her quick, furtive way of turning, and often dreamed in the wide window such dreams as brought content.

When summer came they went down into the country and opened the old house. They put up gay awnings, set up their tea table on the veranda; they built a pergola which ran down to the clump of elders and willows by the river bank; they motored back and forth to the city. Forgetfulness was king.

In some unexplained way the reign of forgetting swayed Perry Grant too. He did not ask Janet if the time was at hand when he might speak on a forbidden subject; he did not mention that he had ever sought the subject. As if it were a new thing, he said:

"When you have time in so much motoring and tearing around, I wish you would try and love me."

His heart leaped as he watched her. He had gone to the country for the weekend, and when Janet came out of the house with a basket on her arm, he joined her.

"Where to?" he said. "With so much fresh white garment?"

"After eggs for the family breakfast. Come along if you like, and see the little place, and the joy that the owner takes in her chickens and cows."

"That is the home feeling," he experimented. "It is not eggs or cows that make it; it lives in the city quite as well. It's no trick to get that feeling when you find the right person to share it with you."

There were long cobwebs swinging through the grass at the side of the road. On these gossamer strings beads of dew were still shining; off against the sky line a yellow haze clung, the first small hints that summer was on the wane.

He looked sidewise at her and switched his line of talk.

"The first fall signs are in the air this morning," he said.

"Yes. Too bad. I hate to have it come."

"Why do you hate it? It will be as lovely in town. To sit about the fireplace

and see the flames chase each other, and see the snow on the river; there is nothing the matter with that, Janet, as a setting for joy."

She made no reply, and then he said boldly:

"When you have time I wish you would try and love me."

She shot a glance at him.

"All right. But I'm very busy just now."

He thought it was possible to hear a heart that beat as hard as his, but he answered in the same tone.

"I won't interfere with your pleasure; but you'll take up that business on your first intermission, won't you, Janet?"

She turned through the white picket gate without replying, and he waited there for her.

"There is no one to envy in the world," he said to himself. "The gayest youth has nothing on me. If I get happiness now, it will mean more than if I had had it years ago. I shall take it understandingly. I'll know what it would have meant not to have it."

He told Janet that when she came out.

"Janet," he said, just before they joined the others, "the world isn't big enough to hold all the love I'll give you." She raised her eyes, and they were full of what he had waited for—brimming over with promise.

Then Rex came toward them, and there were no more words, only one long, straight look from the level eyes of both.

Before Perry went back to the city, though, it was understood. Just five minutes alone together, after the luggage had been carried out, finished it.

Finished it very suddenly, too. He had said only:

"Janet," and held out his hand. She had put hers into it; and he had said "God bless you."

They both held that moment as their own special secret for the short time that remained of country life. It was an immensely youthful feeling to have a secret and to fancy that the others did not see.

It was late when they went back to the city house. Again the river was flecked with ice, and still not once had Adele seen a searching glance upon her, not once had there been strangeness in her voice or wants, not once had she lingered oddly.

Resolutely Rex Danby had fought from his mind recollection and dread. He told

himself that it was unfair to Adele even to think of the hideousness of those years which had been lifted from the total of his life's happiness.

One night he sat again by the fireplace in the drawing-room, waiting for Adele and the rest to come down to dinner. He looked remarkably handsome in his evening clothes.

He looked up to smile at Janet, who crossed to the fire.

Instantly he was cold, chilled by the look in her face.

"Her door is locked," she said.

But almost as she spoke the curtains moved at the entrance, and Adele stumbled slightly as she crossed the threshold and looked at them.

She spread out both arms.

"Take her!" she cried in a strange high voice.

X

THREE summers had spread their glory over the upcountry place since Janet Waring had seen it. On the first morning of her return she was up early and went down the steps into the old-fashioned garden.

She had peeped into Mary's room. She wanted to see how Mary would take the home-coming; she wanted to be with her when the girl saw the old garden under its late summer glow. Mary would look at it with new eyes, Janet thought.

She had left it when it was just a romping place; she would view it now as a new setting, for three years had launched Mary astonishingly into young womanhood.

Janet sighed as she walked. It was a new complication, this arriving of Mary over the line of childhood. When Janet was seventeen the problem would not have been so great, but the day and the age had put a different slant on girlhood.

Mary was like the rest of the new girls, confident, alert, and understanding—to understanding, Janet thought.

She would rather have had Mary shy and waiting to be spoken to, yet still this new assumption of management and wisdom had its attraction. Janet smiled unwillingly as she recalled Mary's belief in herself.

Janet crossed the lawn, looked longingly at the pergola pointing the way to the river. But she returned to the veranda, where she would be sure to hear Mary when the child should decide to wake up.

Janet had long allowed herself the privilege of not considering. In three years abroad she had found that happiness lay in taking each day's pleasures, and not tincturing them with either past or future. She had passed successfully through that period, and was at the beginning of another. An early morning on the veranda, quite alone, directed her thoughts into channels that she had avoided.

More than three years ago Mary had passed definitely into her charge. No, she must go back farther than that to pick up all the old threads, and see what sort of cloth she had woven from them.

She'd go back—not painfully any more—to the time when Adele stepped in between her and her planned future. It gratified her to remember how she had put away her own emotion at that time. She was sure that Rex had never thought of the half promise of their early days.

She had seen him marry Adele, and neither of them had a suspicion of what lay under that smiling, sisterly regard. She had stayed away until the baby came; then, swiftly, there was the time when she could no longer stay away, but lived in Adele's home to stand as a shield between her and the world, to keep the skeleton far back and out of sight.

She and Rex had done it in a masterly way. They had, also in a masterly way, faced and shaped the future when covering up was hopeless. In all those early trying years—ten of them—she and Rex had met on the level ground of a common love.

Then the end had come, and she had taken Mary to Paris, there to find interest in her development. Then Rex had written to come back. He and Adele were in the West. Their return was early expected.

Rex had said that it was safe to bring Mary again into the life of her mother. He had written first hopefully, then confidently. Adele's letters, too, were confident, triumphant; they struck high lights of joyful certainty.

Janet was to find at home some one else who had been strong during separation. She had a clear picture of the day when she had gone down into the drawing-room to tell Perry Grant the plan, that she was to take Mary abroad for a little time. That was how she and Rex had agreed to put it—"a little time."

Perry Grant was not taken into the secret. She had not discussed him with Rex.

She had not told of the day when they had clasped hands and decided to spend a future together. She had neither told Rex of the engagement, nor told Perry of the cause for her journey. She had said only that she must go.

She recalled, in the warmth of the sunshine this first morning, that he had asked no questions, and had not seemed curious. He had only looked at her as if she were dependable. He had remonstrated, of course, and she had not replied. At the last, after he had beat in vain against her determination, he had said whimsically:

"I will take up the waiting game again. I should be expert at it. I've had it many years."

"I know," she had said. "And I cannot explain. If you do not want to wait—"

He had never taken her into his arms before, but he did then. She flushed there alone, as she thought of it. And his letters had all been repetitions of that clasp.

She felt as she read them that she was understandably not understood. Not that he wrote her love letters; they were apt to be businesslike, but they were all signed "The Waiter."

Just then he, too, was in the West, but soon would be back, and they would all be together. Over her horizon there was a rose light that she had seen before. Surely now it would be allowed to come higher and to stay.

She raised her head with a swift intake of breath, and saw a rider coming over the crest of the hill cityward. She frowned. It was impossible not to recognize the rider, and he was one of the problems she had not yet studied in the cool of that first morning.

Kellogg White had always been part of their lives at the country place, but for a year he had been a distinctly disturbing part. Before they had gone abroad, he had been fresh from college, lanky, inclined to be profound, seeing Mary only when she happened to be underfoot.

Meeting him in Paris had been a pleasure. But Janet had noticed how Mary flashed into young womanhood when Kellogg White adopted a young-lady tone in speaking to her.

At once Mary had added interest in her hats and shoes; that interest—pronounced always—had mounted to fever heat from the first day that Kellogg asked her to ride with him in the Bois.

It had been impossible to discourage him on the other side of the water, and impossible to mention any excuse why he should not come home on the same boat. She liked him; and on the return voyage he had, with deep diplomacy, included her in his walks about the deck with Mary.

But the signs pointed to one thing. It would not hurt Mary to have a first love affair—there must be a first—but she preferred it to go on under the inspection of Mary's father.

So she frowned when she saw him riding gayly over the hill from his own home, at a ridiculously early hour of their first morning.

He ignored the remains of the frown, and looked beyond her to the open front door.

"Mary out?" he said casually.

"Really, Kellogg, it is hardly day yet. Did you expect her to be up in the middle of the night?"

"Six o'clock," he replied.

She looked at him severely. He took off his cap and pushed back the damp rings of hair on his forehead; then he sat down beside her on the top step. She watched him. He was clasping his fingers over his knees, unclasping them to entwine them another way—brown, strong fingers. She clung to her remnants of a frown.

"When do the folks get back?" he asked.

"We have not heard. But I fancy on any train. I'm sure they will be here at least to-morrow. I was wondering if the early evening train stops at the station here now. Sometimes it does, you know, and sometimes it does not."

"I was about to suggest," he said eagerly, "that I ride over and see. Maybe Mary would like to go, too. It's important, you know; so I thought—maybe we could ride over. I came to see—"

"I'm glad, Kellogg, that you've found out what you came for."

She could not make her voice as dryly cool as she wanted to, because of the boyish, clasping, brown fingers. It was amusing to see a young man really embarrassed and self-conscious before her.

Kellogg had no self-consciousness in the past. He had had too much belief in himself then, and he had too little now. It meant one thing.

"I used to think you liked me, Miss Waring," he said reproachfully.

"I do like you."

"But you give me slaps all the time." She watched red creep over the ear nearest her. Then he turned suddenly and faced her. "Do you do it because you don't want me to like Mary?"

Quickly she decided not to parry.

"I'd like to discourage you from liking her too much. You are too young."

"I am twenty-four. My father was married at my age."

"Married!" There was horror in Janet's tone. "I hope you have no such idea in your head about Mary. You've not said anything to her about such a thing, have you? She is far, far too young."

"I haven't said anything—yet." He was looking straight at her, very eager, very earnest, embarrassment forgotten. "I have not said anything to her yet, but I believe that I will, almost any time now."

"Please do not."

"I don't believe I can help it. I wanted you to know. I want to be honest with you about it."

"Thank you, Kellogg. Will you kindly keep those ideas to yourself for awhile? She is too young. Don't disturb that youth yet. You are a fine boy, but you can wait before you say anything about marriage to Mary."

"But I want her to know how I feel." Janet smiled.

"It is quite as plain to see as your nose, Kellogg, and has been for a year."

"Do you think she sees? Do you think she understands?"

Janet's lightness dropped from her before the awe in his voice, before his straight look.

"You must wait, Kellogg," she said soberly. "I dare say she sees. Girls know those things. Likely she knew it before you did. I wish you'd promise not to talk to her about it yet. If you promise, I think you'll keep it. Wait a couple of years."

"Years! You don't know. You never cared for any one, Miss Waring, or you would not ask me to promise about years. You've never cared for any one."

Janet's eyes misted. She thought of her own years, and the man who signed himself "The Waiter."

Kellogg was talking.

"You see, the best of life is very short. When you waste years, you can never get them back. You are only young once, and

youth should be as full of joy as you can stick it. Shouldn't it? There can never be joy when you begin to be old."

"Oh, yes, there can! Your little young loves are not half as big as later ones. The self-sufficiency of youth is maddening," she finished, laughing; for he was looking at her curiously.

Heels clicked on the hall floor back of them.

"You are on your honor, Kel," she said hastily as Mary came out.

She wore her riding habit, and looked like a slender young boy.

"Hello, Kel," she said carelessly. "Gosh, what a morning! You riding too?"

"I thought I'd ride over and see about the trains," he answered eagerly.

"Guess I'll go with you."

They seemed so capable of managing their own affairs that Janet only said:

"No breakfast, I suppose, Mary?"

"When we are back, Aunt Janet, give us both a bite."

She watched them go across the lawn to the stables, both tall and erect, and she wondered at her own temerity in trying to shape their lives for them. Youth shaped its own life nowadays, didn't it? She sighed a little for the old fashion then out of date.

She told herself that Mary was just a child, no matter how sure she seemed. If a big thing came that needed decision, she'd turn to age, as it was proper for youth to do. This new confidence was of the surface. Mary would not know where to turn in a great issue any more than youth of the past knew—it was surface, that was all.

They came galloping home within the hour, to say that the evening train stopped at the station, and to eat with appetites that apparently had nothing to do with sentiment. Janet told herself again that they were just children, and that she need not worry.

XI

THE much discussed evening train brought Rex and Adele, and after dinner, while Mary and her mother were close together at the end of the veranda, Janet turned swiftly to Rex. He answered the question she did not speak:

"I think, Janet, that you are to be free for Grant." Then he laughed at her flush.

"He told me about it. He traveled East with us, and will be up here for the weekend.

"Janet, you have effaced yourself long enough. I couldn't believe you had not told him what was keeping you apart, but I saw that you had not. Janet—you fine girl—I believe our troubles are over. Everything is all right.

"She has been very happy, very like herself. I've watched her closely. I've known all the time just where she was, and what she was doing."

Janet hesitated before she said:

"I wonder about our method of watching her, Rex. I've wondered if it didn't get on her nerves sometimes."

"But what else could we do but watch her?" he exclaimed surprisingly. "I've done it, and I haven't seen a sign for so long that I'm pretty sure."

They did not speak of it again during the last weeks of their stay at the country place. Adele was quite as she had been in the early days of her marriage. Janet rejoiced in her beauty, her gayety, her plans for the winter in town. When Perry Grant came, Adele said to him:

"I hate you, Perry, for wanting Janet. I don't see how to live without her. Where shall you live?"

This was before Janet and Perry had had a word alone, but he turned gravely to her.

"Where shall we live, Janet?" he asked, most businesslike.

Then they all laughed at her because she did not know what to say. She had never been the center of anything before. It was odd to be treated as if she were the important person—more important than Adele and her needs; than Rex's successful career. She could not get used to this having a place in the foreground.

The wedding day was set for the first month at the town house, and plans were well under way. Mary laughed because it was all so calm.

"Uncle Perry, when I'm to be married, I'm sure I will look different. But you are just as cool as ever, and you loiter about just the same way. You don't seem as if you were in love at all."

He had laughed, and said:

"Ask Janet." And Janet had flushed and glowed.

Back at the town house, deep in plans for the wedding, Kellogg White was a con-

stant visitor. One of the first days he went to Adele and said:

"You don't want ideas of marriage put into Mary's head yet, I suppose?"

Then he told Adele, straightforwardly and briefly, that just as soon as he had her permission, he wanted to ask Mary for some sort of promise, and that he hoped he would not ask until he was permitted; but if he did, he'd like forgiveness in advance.

Adele liked him; she had a thoughtful day or two because Mary was growing up. She talked it over with Rex, and then the calm current of their lives took the boy along with it.

Kellogg White came into the drawing-room of the town house one early, snowy, winter day. Mary had gone out with Janet, and he had agreed to wait for them.

The servant admitted him, and he went straight to the drawing-room. It was empty and still. The big fire of logs was glowing at one end of the room, and at the other end the broad windows framed the river, flecked with the last of the afternoon sun.

He looked out, and then went back to the fire and sat beside it, building the pictures that the future held for him, stretching his feet out to the shining fender, feeling the influence of calm happiness that the house radiated, and which should radiate from his own house some day.

That day should be not very far off, either. Just as soon as the foolishness of getting the two older people married was over, he'd take some desperate step. Mary understood. He knew that, and he wanted to talk to her about it.

Suddenly, beyond the curtains into the library, he heard a slight clink, then heard it a second time. He had heard no one in there, and the library was entered only through the drawing-room, detached from the other part of the house.

He listened. He thought of the glass doors opening on the rear veranda. The clink might have been from the outside, some one trying to enter.

He stepped quickly through the curtains.

Adele whirled at the far end of the room. She crowded both hands behind her, and flattened herself against the wall.

Then she saw who it was, and laughed oddly. She came slowly forward, still holding her hands behind her.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Danby,

for coming in like this! I was waiting, and hadn't heard any one in here. I thought some one might be breaking in, or something. I heard a noise."

She did not answer, and walked around the side of the room, still with her hands behind her. He noticed a vacant space in the bookshelves where she had been standing; there were a dozen books lying on the shelf, and leaving a space where they had been.

"What's the matter," he said. "You're not ill, are you? What is it?" for she had lifted her head, was staring at the door into the other room, and cowering where the shadows lay deepest.

Then some one was walking heavily, and Rex Danby stood between the curtains.

Kellogg saw him look about the room, first at him, then at Adele, still crowded back against the shelves with hands behind her. He saw Rex Danby suddenly grow white, take swift strides, seize her hands from behind her.

He saw him wrest something from her, and throw it straight through the glass doors. Glass shivered and splintered against glass.

Then Kellogg, growing cold with horror, saw Rex take his wife's wrists in one hand, heard him say words that he never forgot, saw him wrench her wrists together and fling her from him.

"Where do you get it? Where do you get it?" Rex cried, and then there was the crash of the drawing-room door; he was gone, and Kellogg himself ignored.

Adele had fallen over the end of the couch under the shelves. He went to her, picked her up, made her sit on the couch, and sat beside her.

"Don't," he said, for she was shaking silently. "Don't mind. Don't."

She turned to meet the gentleness in his voice, and put her face into his shoulder. She clung to him, and he held her quietly for a long time. Then she began to talk—brokenly, waveringly.

Kellogg White felt himself grow swiftly some one else, some one much older—as Mary's mother whispered things he could not have believed but for the scene he had just witnessed.

A little later, when Janet and Mary came in, covered with snow, laughing, Janet met Rex's eyes as he stood on the hearth rug.

Her packages dropped to the floor.

Adele's door was unlocked the next

morning, but she was not in her room. She was not there at night, nor the next day, nor the next. Silent, swift search did not reveal where she had gone. Days went past—weeks; and there was no clew to her whereabouts.

XII

In the first weeks after Adele's disappearance, the anxiety was too acute to take cognizance of individual suffering. But one thing was thought of, to find her. Even Mary's agonized fright was passed by as a part of what was.

Except the unlocked front door, there was no sign of her going. Nothing had been taken from her room; even her most intimate belongings were in place. Her bed had not been slept in. She must have gone out stealthily, for Rex had spent the night in the drawing-room, and had heard nothing.

All means of search, quietly obtainable, were tried; then public means were taken, and their friends knew that Mrs. Danby, in an attack of sudden dementia, had wandered from home.

It occurred to Janet, at the center of all this, that no one asked any questions. Mary realized only that her mother had gone; she did not ask why.

Perry Grant entered into the search; he did not ask reasons behind the disappearance, nor for Janet's odd acceptance of it. Neither did Kellogg White question. He came and went on such errands as friends do in houses of death, and as silently.

Janet waited for Rex to speak. She knew of the splintered glass in the library door—she had read the story in his eyes—but a curtain of reserve had dropped between them.

On Janet's side it had reproach and accusation. Under it Rex moved erect, touched less by it than by his own emotions.

More than once he thought to go to Janet and say, "She went because of my cruelty; because of what I said to her." But as the weeks slipped by he did not speak.

Indeed, there was little talking in that house. It was like the first days after all has been carried out, except the faint, sweet, clinging smell of the flowers.

On Christmas Day, Kellogg carried a box to Mary. It was such a small box that he put it into his vest pocket and buttoned

his coat over it. It made but a small bunch after the buttoning, but the pressure thrilled him.

It seemed to him that no one was doing anything for Mary. Her father was either not there, or silent and stern; Janet had given Mary second place for her own distress.

He did not know that Mary would care for the contents of that box, but it would at least give her something new to think about, and his heart bumped against it as he joined her.

She looked up with the gasp that always followed the opening of any door, the arrival of any one. She looked beyond him. It hurt, that she looked constantly beyond whoever came in.

He went directly to the subject.

"This," he said, taking out the little box, unsnapping the lid and turning it toward her; "this I have brought to ask you if you will wear, and let it mean that you will marry me as soon—as soon as your father will let you.

"It is not a Christmas gift, it's an engagement ring; but I thought that if you took it on Christmas that it would make that day always right for us in the future. Do you want it, Mary?"

"Yes, I want it," she said; and they kissed each other gravely.

Then they sat down by the fire, and he patted her hand. It was not at all as he had fancied it would be when words were actually spoken between them. It was not the way they did it in books; she had not smiled nor blushed, but she patted his hand, too, as they sat together.

"I want to take you for a walk," he said. "There is a particular place that I want to take you."

She turned quickly.

"A particular place! Why, you don't mean—"

"No, darling, I don't mean anything—not what you want me to mean," he said.

They went out. It was commencing to snow, and great flakes spotted her, poised themselves on the dark fur about her sober face. They hailed a motor bus.

"Let's go on top," said Mary; "the way we used to."

So they climbed up and sat down in the snow-flecked top. They talked little; it was the first time she had gone out of the house with him since that tragedy two months behind them.

He smiled reassuringly at her when she looked up, and once she took off her glove, and the contents of Kellogg's box sparkled bravely.

"I like it," she said very low.

"All right," he answered in the same tone.

How unlike what he had thought his final winning of her would be! Into his young pounding heart there came the realization that their silent, grave betrothal would mean a great deal to her later on. Some day she would like it that he had not flaunted his happiness at that time, even to her.

They rode to the end of the line, and then walked farther up the river edge. The snow had stopped, and the sun made last splashes of red and gold over the breaking clouds.

Kellogg stopped and leaned over the stone parapet. Back of them, sumptuous apartment houses were beginning to show lights; in front of them the river, and beyond the hills, twinkling, too, with lights.

"Is this the particular place you wanted to take me?" she asked.

"Yes, I thought the view was particularly fine from here, and that you would like to see it."

He took her home, noting that there was color in her lips; that three separate times she had spoken first.

Then he went back alone the way they had gone, and mounted to the top floor of one of the big, brilliant structures above where they had stood.

His ring was instantly answered, and Adele stretched out both hands.

"I could see her so plainly! Dear little girl! Oh, thank you, Kellogg. You will bring her again, won't you? I feel almost as if I were home again to have seen her. She suffers, doesn't she, Kellogg? But she suffers now, that she may not suffer later."

"Have you had an outing yourself? No, of course you haven't. Put on your things, and we will take our walk, Mrs. Danby. I must keep you fine and fit for Mary after awhile."

They walked far up the river and back. For an hour they talked, and Kellogg wondered—as he did every time he thought of it—at the success of his plan. He had not really worked it out at all; it had brought itself to him as he sat with Mary's mother in the half light of the library on that day long past.

A determination to have a hand in the thing came to him. Through Adele's broken sentences he had caught enough to understand the history. She had not spared herself. She had used such brief, plain words that they had glittered before him. He explained his idea to her at once.

"If I'm any good at all," he told her, "I must help you and Mary with this. It's not hopeless. Let me plan."

He said that over and over before it made any impression on her desperation and hopelessness. There seemed to Kellogg to be nothing to do but help her. He had to manufacture an idea, and a workable way of carrying it through.

He had to; for he had seen Rex Danby, had heard him, known instantly what Mary must know, unless he could do something to help.

In Adele's despair he saw certain tragedy. To her, flight was the only refuge, and flight alone, in her condition of mind, was out of the question. So he made some instant, crude, impossible plans; they carried them out, letting them develop themselves from hour to hour, and day to day.

Adele was talking now with her old alertness. He dragged himself back from his recollections to hear her.

"To see her has been such a help! You can make her happy, Kellogg. And the others, they will have to go on suffering. They must wait. Janet and Rex—poor Rex.

"Do you know, Kellogg, your old doctor is wonderful. He gave me a new point of view when he said it was physical. You believe in it, don't you?" and he reassured her as he had a hundred times.

"It's so strange, Kellogg, that a boy like you should have had a hand in this. There is just one trouble—even when I try to depend upon myself as he tells me to.

"I'm afraid I can't quite do it. He says the right thing, but—somehow—I can't quite take it in. You see, I carried for so long a resentment against Rex. I used to say to him, too, that it was his fault. And if it was his fault, how can my own determination hold it fast?

"If I could eliminate dependence and stand alone, not be afraid of Rex, or what he would say or think, for he is dominating, Kellogg. I need something else, more than the old doctor with his tonics and gentle preachments.

"I need some one who has absolute belief in me, whom I'd be ashamed to fail—not some one who loves me but is watching me until I do fail."

"It almost comes to that. It may seem like too great a wish; I need some one who cannot believe in failure, not watching me—forgetting me because there is nothing to watch. Do you get it at all, Kellogg, the thing that makes me afraid?"

"Partly, dear Mrs. Danby, I get it."

"And how are we to end this?"

"We don't plan, do we? Isn't that a part of our system? To let things alone, and let them work themselves out?"

"But it *will* work out, won't it?" He turned to face the pleading in her voice.

"As sure as life is life," he said stoutly. "It will work out."

XIII

THE gray winter slipped dully into spring. Kellogg wondered and worried about how the end was to come of the plan which he had built up thinly, and placed upon no foundation. It still stood; that was the best he could say.

Rex Danby brought the end into view. He had forsaken the drawing-room, and sat hours alone upstairs. Sitting there in the dark, he heard Mary laugh in the hall outside. There had been no laughing in that house, and the sound of it flashed into sharp fire a smoldering flame of resentment against her.

In the weeks since Mary's engagement had been accepted by the family, he had resented her growing interest in everything. It seemed unfitting that Adele's daughter should forget for a moment.

Her youth did not excuse Mary for moving more lightly, for going out and coming in, for taking up young interests again. For himself, the burn had gone deeper as the months passed.

At first he was sure that it was but a question of time until she was found, and there was an understanding between them. He was willing to punish Adele for the suffering she had caused, and he had distinct ideas as to how it could be done.

But she had not been found. The best detective work had brought no clew. As the months passed, he was not so sure of what he would say to her when she was found; his plan to punish her faded.

Then he lopped off entirely the idea of punishing her; then he lopped off the idea

that she would be found at once, and of late the stifling belief had come that she would not be found at all. When that belief came, he left the others downstairs; then he heard Mary laughing in the hall.

He flung open the door and went out. She scuttled past him. She shrank from him and he was angry, but he was more angry because a light, striking over her head, showed an eager, wistful poise; a resemblance that pinched his heart in a swift, certain grasp.

He went on downstairs and into the drawing-room. Perry Grant and Janet looked up. Just then a sharp rattle of hail came on the windows, a wail of sudden wind; a streaming of ice-filled rain against the glass.

"Beastly night," said Grant cheerfully. "March enters like a very wet and disagreeable lion. Come to the fire, Rex. I was about to ask for you. In fact, I had asked, but Janet didn't want to disturb you. Sit down with us."

They looked comfortable, and Rex was angry that they could. He did not sit down. He would not have accepted the invitation for a great deal. He stood erect and uncompromising. Grant was not abashed.

"Sorry to bring it up, Rex, but do you see any reason why Janet and I cannot begin to live our own lives? Shouldn't we have that long-promised chance of a home?"

"Never mind, Janet—" for she had stretched a protesting hand—"Rex knows that if any sacrifice of ours could change the condition in his house, that we would sacrifice gladly. But I don't see that anything we do makes any difference."

"We have given all our thought to you in this trouble—and now, when there seems to be no end in sight, it is time to think of ourselves. Not that we are losing either anxiety or sympathy, old man; but don't you see that we want to think of ourselves a little?"

Rex Danby clutched for self-possession, and the ability to do what he knew was the right thing. He did it fairly well.

"Of course, Perry. You're right. Janet has sacrificed herself long enough. I am—glad to have her do what will make her happier."

"I knew you'd say that," said Grant heartily. "I couldn't make her believe that you would. Tell her yourself, Rex, that you can do without her."

"It would be hard for any one to do without Janet," he said with a stiff smile. "She has held my home together. As there is nothing to hold together now, I—I don't need you, Janet. Go and take happiness."

Janet crossed to him swiftly.

"Don't say it that way; don't say you have nothing to hold together. You have Mary to think of, and to take care of and watch."

She stopped and took her hand from his arm. Into each mind there flamed a memory of another time, when she had touched him in the same way, and charged him with the care of some one else. Rex had a sharp picture of his wedding day, when Janet had said nearly the same words to him about Mary's mother. His face worked.

"You said that once before to me, Janet. You remember. I failed that time you trusted me."

Into the tightness of the moment, Grant spoke.

"Mary has a backer in Kellogg, too. Fine boy. Between you two men she'll be taken care of."

Rex's face darkened.

"I'm not sure he'll have the chance to help me."

He went on before they had time to ask questions on their lips.

"I heard to-day, and heard it from authority that I can't dispute, that Kellogg is seen about constantly with a woman—'an attractive woman' was the description, and that he is a constant visitor at her home."

"Nonsense," said Grant; "nothing to it."

"I'll find out what there is to it."

"Of course. But take my word, there's nothing."

Even as they looked at each other, the door opened, and Kellogg White came in. He joined the group at the fireplace and noted the silence at once.

"Am I interrupting?" he flushed. "I beg your pardon. You have all made me feel so at home here that I bolt in at all times. Don't hesitate to send me away."

"We were talking of you," said Perry Grant. "Rex has heard of a mysterious beautiful woman, and your visits to her. We were trying to get worked up to a frenzy about it."

"But you are here in time to prevent that. We were trying to look upon you

as a gay deceiver. You may burst our bubble of excitement; who is the mysterious lady?"

He said it so lightly that Janet joined his smile.

Kellogg did not answer. The three watched him. Grant took a step backward.

"We are waiting to hear what you have to say," said Rex very evenly.

Kellogg lifted his head.

"Just now I think I will say nothing," he answered.

He was so startled by the suddenness of it that his voice sounded defiant. He laughed; and just then a laugh was a brazen thing.

It came as a final rasping touch to Rex Danby.

"We have had enough of trouble and mystery here. You shall not add to it. You will oblige me by leaving the house, and staying away."

Then they saw Mary standing in the doorway watching the group with startled, understanding eyes.

XIV

MARY had heard. She stepped back at once into the hallway; Janet sprang after her. Kellogg, too, stepped back, and stood fixedly. Mary was climbing the stairs a step at a time, her hand on the railing, when Janet overtook her, and put one arm about her. The girl turned in her clasp.

"Please go back, Aunt Janet," she said quietly. "Please go back and close the door. Let me alone awhile, please."

It was a new tone with nothing of eighteen in it. To Janet the voice held pathos, but a dignity she must obey.

She dropped Mary's arm and turned back into the drawing-room as she had been directed, and closed the door. She even leaned against it that the others might respect the demand of the shaken voice.

Then Mary whirled on the stairway, and ran down to where Kellogg stood motionless. She grasped his arm.

"Take me at once!" she cried. "Take me to her at once! Oh, I know! Haven't you seen that I was getting happier every day! I know who it is! Take me right away to my mother!"

"How did you know?"

"Of course I would know," she said proudly. "How could I help it? I felt the pull of her. I could hardly keep from

asking you a week ago. Oh, I knew! There is nothing ever like one's mother.

"I felt it from that first day when you took me out on the Drive. The second time I knew it better, and after that I was almost sure. Those stupid people—" She flung one arm back toward the closed door. "Quick! I'll meet you on the steps in a second. Quick!"

Kellogg sent her in alone to her mother. Mary was vibrant, pulsing with excitement, confident. She had no time for tears, she caught her mother back from emotions, she steadied her with the clasp of her arms.

"Now," she said, wiping her eyes after the first sudden tears; "now, what is this? Tell me all about it. I'm not a baby. Doing without a mother as long as I have makes one grow up. They have told me nothing, and I have not asked. I wanted to hear the reason from you. What is it? Let's talk it over."

Adele blanched.

"Dear, I cannot talk about it to you. Whatever it was—the trouble—I'm sure it has quite gone now."

"Is this the first time you have thought that the trouble—whatever it is—was quite gone?"

Her mother started.

"No, it is not the first time."

"And the trouble—whatever it was—it came back?"

"Yes."

"Then"—Mary's eyes were bright and steady—"you are a little afraid it may come again?"

Adele did not answer, and Mary caught her hands.

"Talk it over. Talk it out with me. I'm the nearest friend you have. I'm your friend. Forget what else I am. I'm just a friend now. Let me help. The rest of them have failed you somehow, haven't they? Let me hear about it all."

"Not to you, child! I cannot talk about it to you!"

"But you could run away and leave me alone; for one is always alone when a mother is gone."

"Oh, Mary!"

"When you did that," said Mary slowly, "you made me grow up suddenly. I've not been young since the night you went away. I've been quite old. And since you have made me old, you must tell me why. It is not fair to me, not to tell."

It took a half hour to tell the story. Adele began bravely, faltered, took courage, hesitated, bared her heart of the smallest things—of her resentment toward Rex; she made it all as clear as she could.

When she finished she dropped her head on her hands, flooded over with the defiances, the failures, the dependencies, fearing how the child would take the history.

"Hm-m—" said Mary briskly. "Odd, isn't it?"

"Odd!" repeated her mother, a trivial, casual little word for the great enveloping tragedy!

"It seems to me," said the young, clear voice, "that they all went at it the wrong way. Why didn't they say, 'Don't do that again, Adele?'"

She laughed at the use of her mother's given name. "Instead of making it such a dreadful thing, and impressing it upon you, why didn't they just pass it off and leave it to you? They frightened you, mother, by making you think you needed a lot of help, when really it was all very little—just for you to stop."

"Just for me to stop?"

"Yes. Do it yourself. Just stop."

"Yes." Adele spoke slowly. "I didn't see that. I was expecting your father to do something—and blaming him."

"That's it." Mary was still brisk. "Instead of attending to it yourself, you were thinking resentfully, not seeing how strong you are, and how you don't need to be led by any one."

"Not led—by any one. I always have been led, Mary."

"Of course. I see that. You told it clearly; by Aunt Janet and by father—they have done your thinking for you. You poor dear. You've had no chance to get up what is called 'a strong character.'"

Adele looked at her daughter silently. The minutes slipped by leisurely, restfully; Adele sighed, relaxed, clung to both firm young hands.

"Then—it doesn't seem a dreadful thing to you?"

"Oh, yes," said Mary cheerfully. "Quite dreadful. So just stop all thought of it ever again."

"It's—it—may be—physical, Mary."

"Piffle!" said her daughter.

"Oh!" said Adele. "Oh!"

"It would be just doing what you most want. Then why not? You don't want to stay here by yourself, do you; nor have

ugly feelings toward poor father?—you wouldn't if you knew how stern he has grown. You don't want to be different from other people. So just don't be. That's all; it's quite simple."

"Do you think—" began Adele. Mary interrupted her.

"When you were a little girl, Aunt Janet took care of you; then father took care; then you got panicky when this trouble came up—you got to watching to see if they were keeping tab on you.

"The more they watched, the more self-conscious you were, the more frightened, the more full of that one thing all the time. You couldn't forget it. Even dear Kellogg has been bolstering you—and over there I see a medicine bottle and a spoon. Dearest, dearest mother—you don't need any people, or anything. Do it yourself."

Adele's laugh had an hysterical note.

"After all these years a child tells me what to do, and it sounds convincing. But you—you are so young. How can you understand and make me understand?"

"That's the way we do it now, mother. We see quickly, and we act quickly. We don't stand around and let others manage for us nowadays. We tell other people to go hang, and we run our game ourself. You are old-fashioned, mother darling. You are behind the times. You lean. Get up on your own legs, dearest mother."

"Mary—shall I go home with you? May I?"

"I don't know. You are the one to decide. Don't ask me. What do you think yourself?"

"I don't know. Shall we have Kellogg come up and ask him?"

"Have him up, but don't ask him what to do. You must do exactly what you think best."

Kellogg had waited below stairs, glad that some sort of an end had come, sorry that it had come so unexpectedly. He marveled that Mary had discovered what he supposed was concealed. He was troubled, too; he did not see how any definite result had been reached.

He wondered if, after all, the last few months had been only another variety of the old problem in the Danby home, if it would be the same old story over again, if the months of hiding were only another intermission.

He was distinctly depressed, as if he had

been caught in an enterprise that had brought trouble, and had accomplished nothing. He felt very young, very inconsequent.

Almost anything might have happened, he thought, as he went upstairs. But it was all matter-of-fact. Mary was buttoning her coat, and looking eager and serene. Adele was as usual.

"Mother thinks it is time we were getting home," said Mary. "It's nearly midnight. There is probably a tremendous flutter at home. Mother thinks we'd better go?"

"Are you coming, too?" he asked Adele. She shook her head.

"Mother thinks not just yet. She has a few things to decide first."

"I believe—" began Kellogg. Mary shook her head at him.

"No one will do any thinking for her any more. Mother fixes her own plans. She is the one who decides."

XV

ADELE sat long in a little straight chair by her unlighted window after they had gone. She was thinking that Mary might, after all, only have spurred a recognized decision. She remembered an old uncle who, when she was very small, had said that her chin was exactly like her father's.

"That child has the Waring chin. She will take care of herself."

She had not understood what he meant about her chin, and had looked at it carefully in the parlor mirror; it might have some deformity, she feared, like the boy at the corner who had a hunch between his shoulders.

She had been early taught never to ask him about his curious hunch. And some one else had said—so memory flashed—that she had her father's will.

All right. It was time, then, to take that will out of the cotton batting of Janet's care, and Rex's watchfulness.

It seemed easy to do that. Only one complication would be hard to set straight. The stubborn one was her feeling toward Rex, who had bruised her wrists. Mary was stimulating; Janet was forgiving, and would cover her fugitive doubts if she had them. But Rex had caught her wrists in his hands and wrenched them.

Rex had spoken hideous words to her. And the bruises—they had lasted for days on both wrists.

What had they done to a future with him? Bruises were such flesh and blood things. Rex had been stern and masterful—still was, of course. He had swept ahead, conquering, wresting, sure of himself, sure that he could set others right.

Her weakness was the only thing that had ever baffled him. He had spent years trying to drive that weakness into a corner where he could control it. He had done this with much patience and love, and little understanding.

Only once had he lost his calm, superior judgment—the day when he had bruised her wrists. It was not fair to do that! He had taught her—

She halted herself suddenly. What was her father's chin for if she could not control that resentment against Rex? And Mary—funny little Mary with her confidence and cocky poise!

She rose and walked about the room. How would her chin get along when what it represented met the confidence of her husband?

He had ruled so long. But then he had to rule—poor Rex—when she was so pitifully weak.

To go home was easy enough: to meet Janet, Perry Grant; the friends; to see their curiosity and hear their unspoken questions. She would not mind that—and if she did, it was proper that she should pay.

She caught her breath at thought of the home, the dear inanimate things there. There was a small picture of the Delphic sibyl that she loved; the frame was too slight for the picture—she wondered if it might have fallen apart. She had intended to have a heavier frame put on; she'd thought of it the day of the bruised wrists, before—before she had gone out and met Grace Strobie.

Poor old Grace! Never see or think of her again!

There was really but one embarrassment to be met in taking up the old life—the not knowing what would become of her resentment when she saw her husband. How should she meet him, and how would he meet her? Janet was easy; friends easy—but Rex!

He'd be kind and gentle, would not ask questions, nor make her feel her fault. Rex was not petty. He'd meet her cordially—queer word—he'd kiss her and, as far as he could, would show no watchfulness. He

loved her; he'd act no more "superior" than he could help. But she dreaded his deadly certitude, his unbroken poise.

She did not know what it would do to that resentment which should live no longer.

She went to bed and to sleep without finding full content.

She could not have slept long, for first dawn streaks were lifting away the night when she woke. She dressed quickly, seeing herself in the mirror as bright eyed and flushed. She went out on the street where the pavements were dripping from their nighty bath.

There was one cab at the nearest station. She took it and went home.

As she went she was sorry to go in that melodramatic way; to rush through the early day, not to wait until reasonable hours. But she did not want to wait, she wanted it over, and she was pulled by the home feeling. She wanted it all, the veriest trifles; the Delphic sibyl and the rest.

Her latchkey was in her purse, and she unlocked the door and went in. The dining room shades were up, and a sun streak made a broad band across the table. She had wanted to meet them in that room; it had always been the finest part of the day—the morning meal in that sun-bathed big room.

She had picked up the morning paper from the doorsill, and now she opened it and put it at Rex's place. She listened for the servants. There was no sound in the house.

She took off her hat and coat, and hung them in the hall—excited and yet composed; her heart beating fast and yet confidently. The big old clock in the hall softly, carefully, with its slow deliberate judgment, boomed seven. She frowned. No one ever came down before eight.

There was an hour to wait. Pretty soon she would hear them moving about upstairs, and then they would come down—Rex first; he was always first. She would get up from her chair and—well—then there would surely be an end; surely that meeting would root out any clinging end of disbelief in his need for her.

One of the maids came in from the kitchen. Adele met her with her finger on her lips. In the tearful welcome she found more confidence. There was no curiosity in the girl's greeting, but a great deal of delight. Adele had not supposed that

Susie really liked her, not enough to cry and be stammering with welcome.

The old clock struck another soft, tentative note, meaning seven thirty.

To fill in the time that was yet to be spent she went across the hall and pushed open the door into the drawing-room. It was dark but for an amber-shaded lamp that still glowed from a table. With quick, housewifely steps, Adele crossed to put it out.

Rex lifted his head from the table and looked at her.

Why! He was not confident! Not dominating! He was not there at that

early hour because he was planning some great thing to be achieved. He had been crying! He *was* crying! He must have been there all night in crumpled clothes—he who was so fastidious.

"Rex," she said.

He put up his arms. Rex! Incredible! Her superior, discerning husband! He was asking no question; he wanted no explanation or promise—he wanted her!

As her hands met his she knew that he wanted her not to take care of, nor worry about, nor blame for any earthly thing! He wanted her to cling to as he cried. She put her cheek to his and held him tight.

THE END

THROUGH A LILAC VEIL

Oh, my gray-lapping, sad-sighing harbor
With sail-shriven wraiths in your sway,
The spaces are stricken with echoes
That sound a monotonous lay.
What matter the battles of tides in my sleep,
For I'm not as much as the weed in your deep!
Hung with thought, a canopy
Shades a staring face.
In the howdah, there's but one
Hidden under lace.

Oh, morose and magnificent mountains
With sun-bitten horns in the sky,
The thrustings of thunders are muffled
Where fire-winged meteors fly.
What recks it, you ponder, if I cease to be,
For I'm not as much as the root of a tree!
Dragon flies and plaintive reeds,
Why was I to fail?
Braziers flickered, rich with cloves,
Through a lilac veil.

Oh, horses with manes that are streaming
In snow on the desolate square,
The blast, with a rein of destruction,
Has fashioned a bridle with care.
But I'm not as much as the stones that you tread,
So leave me untroubled, for I am the dead!
Cruel-bladed were his words;
Swift, the final stroke;
Struggling as a flame, my breath
Wast, as he spoke.

Oh, all of the things of creation
That living, I knew and forgot,
The voids have claimed me completely,
For I am a soul that is not.
I lived and I loved, and I marvel to learn
That I, who have perished, would never return!
There were jewels in his hands,
Falling as I fell,
But a single rolling tear
Was my funeral bell.